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Disability and flexible employment: an embodied approach

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

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Discipline of Geography
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Abstract

Disabled people are significantly disadvantaged in employment, with many more unemployed, in lower status occupations and on poorer salaries than their able-bodied counterparts. The increased use of flexible employment methods, including part-time working, temporary contracts and 'flexitime', has raised questions about how the experience of disabled people in employment has been affected. This thesis has this as its motivating issue, that is, have flexible employment practices provided more opportunities for disabled people in employment or further restricted their prospects? After outlining the main issues involved in the disability and employment debate, the thesis uses the period of the two World Wars to draw out the three central themes of disability, flexible employment and the 'body'. These are explored in turn, in particular their changing understandings. The recent social theories of the body are of particular relevance. Rethinking the body as a social and cultural entity, the mind and the physical body of a person connected to, affected by and affecting, social and cultural processes, allows the development of the theory of 'embodiment'. The thesis, using evidence from the main UK disability and employment organisations and three large UK service sector companies, argues that an embodied approach can provide a better understanding of the relationship between disability and flexible employment. An embodied approach forces a focus on the processes of employment and disability by looking at how work operates. It also puts attention on the materiality of employment for disabled people. The spatial practices of employment in the companies can be better understood through an embodied approach as the full range of the interaction between employees and their work - mental and physical - is involved. The whole nature of the meaning of 'employment' and 'disability' is also raised.

For Janine

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“Yet here I am a victim of geography” (from ‘The only one’ by Billy Bragg, 1988)

Ed Hall

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Introduction

There is no doubt that disabled people are in a disadvantaged position in the labour market. More disabled people are unemployed, in low-status occupations, on low earnings, or out of the labour market altogether, than non-disabled people. The position of disabled people in the labour market has been brought into even sharper focus by the increasing presence of 'flexible' working practices in all areas of employment.

The issue at the heart of the research presented here is what impact 'flexible' working practices have had on the employment opportunities and experiences of disabled people. Have flexible employment methods, such as part-time working and temporary contracts, provided greater employment opportunities for disabled people, or have they further excluded disabled people from employment? This is the motivating question of the research. Within this, there are several further questions: how is disability *understood* in relation to flexible employment? What are the implications for disabled people of the spatial organisation of flexible employment? And what are the possible consequences of flexible practices for the meaning and identity of 'disability'?

The purpose of this Introduction is to set out these issues and questions, and to explain the approach that I have taken to them through the issue of disability and the flexible labour market. The Introduction has four sections: firstly, an explanation of the issues of disability and flexible employment; secondly, an examination of the spatial nature of flexible employment and disability; thirdly, a consideration of the debate around disability and identity, and the possible reshaping of this debate in the context of flexible employment; and, fourthly, a description of the 'embodied' approach to disability and employment developed in the research.

Before that, however, it is important to describe the particular approach of the research to the issue of disability and employment. There are two aspects. The first is that the research does not set out to elaborate upon the position of disabled people in the labour market; the highly disadvantaged position that disabled people have in employment is well known. Instead, the research examines the position of disabled people *in* employment, admittedly a minority of the disabled adults who want to work.

Many studies have shown how many disabled people are in and out of work, what job they do and how much they earn. I am more interested in the *process* of employment, that is, the way that disabled people's jobs are organised, what they do in their jobs, how they do them, where and when they work, plus how the companies manage such employees spatially and temporally. The extensive use of flexible working practices has, I would argue, made a focus on the employment process even more crucial. Increasingly, many jobs are no longer of the orthodox, full-time, nine-to-five format and, as such, employment is becoming more unstable and insecure. So, it is not as straightforward to state who is in and who is out of work. It is what happens *in* a job and on the margins between the job and unemployment that really matters. The research, then, refers to flexible *employment* rather than to the flexible labour market as it is concerned with what happens *within* employment. This, as has been conceded above, covers a minority of disabled people's experience of work, but I contend that it is an important area of investigation.

The second aspect of the research's take on disability and employment is that disability in flexible employment is a set of 'embodied' processes. What this means is that the employment experience of disabled people (indeed all people) can be best understood or 'captured' by conceptualising the *process* of employment as something that involves the body of the employee. The term 'the body' is used here to refer to the physical and mental state, attributes and actions of a person. Considering the body, and thinking of work as an embodied, or bodily, process, can help one to get to the heart of the issues of employment: how a person does a job, what they do, when and where they do it and so on. Such an approach provides more than a knowledge of whether a person is in employment or not. It allows us to think about all of the different aspects of work, the organisation, the controls, the structures and the experiences. It also helps us to think more fully about the way that employment is organised spatially because we are considering tangible bodies in space, not just 'employees'. More generally, an embodied approach creates the possibility of a new and exciting debate on the meaning and interpretation of disability and, further, its relationship to ability. Thinking of disability 'through the body' can capture the meaning of what disability is, as the shift is made

away from definitions and models towards experience and debates, in the creation and negotiation of identity.

* * * *

Disability and flexible employment are two of the central concepts of the research - the other being the body - and it is thus important to examine them both. 'Disability' is a term replete with meanings. The dominant understanding of disability is 'the incapacity to do certain things' - such as to move, see, hear and think - in ways deemed 'normal' by society. Disability is usually further understood as the direct result of a physical or mental impairment, through the deformed or diseased nature of the person's body. And the disabled person's position in society, often a poor one in many aspects, is largely, if not entirely, due to their 'abnormal' body and restricted capabilities. This understanding of disability has been hegemonic in the 20th century in the West and remains dominant today (Barnes, 1991). Disabled people are considered to be part of an overall social group facing similar issues. It is assumed to be a grouping based (largely) on biological differences (and the associated social relations) in the same way as women and black people are frequently grouped together. The vast majority of organisations and individuals interviewed for the research and the reference material drawn upon, understood disability and disabled people in their documents, policies and practices in this way. The dominant, what I call *individual*, conceptualisation of disability runs deep in British society.

There is resistance to this dominant way of thinking, however. In the last five to ten years an alternative, *social*, conceptualisation of disability has developed. What began in the UPIAS document of 1976¹ and was developed further by Mike Oliver in 1990², is an attempt to turn the dominant understanding and representation of disability on its head. The cause of disability is shifted *from* the individual's impairment *to* the physical barriers and discrimination of society. In this way, disability becomes the disadvantage that people with impairments experience because of the way that society is organised. It

¹The Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation published their 'Fundamental Principles of Disability' in 1976.

² 'The politics of disablement' developed a 'social theory of disability'.

follows that it is society that has to change to accommodate people with impairments, not the impaired person who has to try and fit into a society and physical environment designed for (and by) able-bodied people. The 'social model' of disability, as this theoretical challenge has become known, has become the central plank of the academic and political attempts to challenge the dominant, individual understanding of disability.

The social model has achieved a tremendous amount through its reconceptualisation of disability. It has made a difference in 'real' terms, for example the campaign for a civil rights bill for disabled people was based on the social model (the resulting Disability Discrimination Act, however, features a 'watered down' version of the model) and for many people with impairments the transfer of 'blame' from individuals to society has provided much satisfaction and relief.

So, the research adopts, to a large extent, the social model, and uses the terms 'impairment' and 'disability' in the way set out by the model:

'Impairment' is 'lacking part or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body'

'Disability' is 'the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities' (UPIAS, 1976, p.3-4).

I would add to this set of definitions *mental* impairment and disability. However, one of the central concerns of the research is to 'open up' the debate around disability and this entails a deconstruction, and possibly a new interpretation, of the term 'disability'. So, for most of the research, the terms 'impairment' and 'disability' will be used as defined above, in line with the social model. Later, however, the 'socially constructed' nature of both terms will be challenged and a new way of interpreting disability (and impairment) outlined; one, as described earlier, that attempts to combine the physical and social elements of what disability is, that is, an approach that rethinks disability as an embodied process.

'Flexibility' has arguably become *the* employment concept of the 1990s in the West. It has developed from an analysis of labour market and economic mechanisms into a prescription for the organisation of economic systems. For an employee or a company, or indeed a national economy, to be 'inflexible' is now viewed as a certain route to

failure. It is crucial, however, to take a closer look at what 'flexibility' really is and to state clearly how the concept is used in this research. The term 'flexibility' was first used to describe the manufacturing methods of certain companies in the mid-1980s in Europe, the USA and Japan, which, in the context of recession, moved from 'Fordist' mass manufacturing techniques to short-run, tailor-made, 'flexible specialisation' (the classic case of this method of manufacture was the 'Benetton' clothing company in Italy). Scott (1988) claimed that this technique spread through small, economically dynamic areas, such as the Emilia-Romagna region in northern Italy and California in the USA, creating a local 'flexible economy' of large companies and subcontractors in a symbiotic system of efficient manufacture.

During the recession of 1990/91 in Britain, many companies, particularly in the service sector (most affected by this recession) began to adopt some of these ideas. The dominant analysis of the UK economy was that at this time it was burdened by large workforces, rigid job demarcation, labour market regulation and inefficient operational practice. The adoption of flexible specialisation methods was considered to be the way to create a more efficient economy. But, crucially, the methods of flexible *production* were translated into flexible *employment* practice. UK companies *did* adopt flexible production techniques, but the 'flexibilisation' of the UK economy has, to a large extent, meant the deregulation of the labour market and the increased use of non-standard employment, particularly part-time working and temporary employment contracts. It is this version of flexibility that the research considers in its analysis of the changing employment practices of three large service sector companies in the UK. However, it is important to state that the significance of flexibility can be overstated. Despite predictions of the end of the full-time permanent job, part-time jobs, temporary work and self-employment do not dominate the UK economy, even in the service sector.³ Nonetheless, flexible working is still extremely important, both in terms of the people and the companies involved, in the

³ Only certain parts of the service sector have a majority of flexible workers, for example cleaning, hotels and catering and retail. There is also a significant gender bias in flexible employment in the service sector, with many more women employed than men. Poor pay and low quality of work are a common feature of service sector flexible work.

way it has challenged the notion of what work is, when it is done, where and how and the boundaries between work and non-work. The research considers the changing meaning of 'work', in the same way as it explores the shifting understanding of 'disability'.

What have been the implications of flexible employment practices for disabled people? This is not a question that has been considered in research, with most studies being more concerned about whether disabled people are in or out of work.⁴ I want to argue that for the disabled people *in* employment, flexible practices are changing the employment *process* and as such the study of flexibility must be central to any investigation into employment and disability. Further, new ways of working could possibly change the employment opportunities and experiences of disabled people. On the 'positive' side of the argument, a deregulated organisation of work that involves part-time working (and therefore not full-time working), 'short' weeks, homeworking and short-term contracts, could offer many disabled people the chance to work to their full potential. Restrictions experienced by certain people - physical, mental, emotional or organisational - can often mean that a full-time, permanent job is impossible to do. Being able to work for shorter periods or in their own time (at home, for example) could make employment a real possibility. On the 'negative' side, such deregulation of work could make employment an even greater difficulty for many disabled people. For some disabled people a lack of certainty of when and where work is and the lack of opportunity to 'settle into' a job if it is a temporary contract, can be a real disincentive to employment. Additionally, those disabled people unable to leave their homes could find that homeworking, while giving them a job and an income, isolates them still further. The way that the social security system is organised at present is also a significant discouragement to work for many disabled people, who rely heavily on state benefits to fund their extra living costs, benefits that can be lost if formal employment is taken on.

The debate, as I see it, is on two 'levels'. Firstly, whether flexible working practices offer new employment opportunities to disabled people or whether they actually further restrict the participation of disabled people in the labour market. Secondly, it

⁴ Data on disabled people in employment is difficult to obtain and inaccurate. Official data on disability is based on 'Registered disabled people', a minority of disabled people in the UK.

raises the question of whether flexible employment has begun to change the meaning of 'work' and the meaning of 'disability'. If flexible working enables a disabled person to be in employment, but excludes an able-bodied person, then can we still think of disability in the same way? Such a situation potentially challenges both the medical and social interpretations of disability, as the person is now both 'able' to do the job and not restricted by the organisation of society. So, does such a disabled person become able-bodied?

There is a further issue here, too, about how looking at disabled people in flexible employment practices may force us to reconsider the meaning and significance of the term 'flexibility'. The term was developed, in its employment practice sense, to describe the (re)organisation of what were assumed to be 'standard' employees, i.e. there was no sense of the diversity of workers included in the analysis. If we introduce the (real life) situation that within any organisation there is a huge range of employees with diverse needs, skills, abilities, desires and so on, including issues of race, gender, age, class, social background, education and disability, then flexibility can no longer be seen simply as a rational, economic organisation of labour, but rather as an imperfect, incomplete set of practices. This approach can best be described as a 'cultural' approach to the economic process, a recent and welcome development in economic geography (see Lee and Wills, 1997), that introduces the unevenness and uncertainties of individual and group actions and decision-making into a supposedly rational system so, hopefully, providing a more complete and familiar picture of what actually 'goes on' inside companies and organisations.

* * * *

A central aspect of employment practice, which conventional economic analysis often ignores, is the spatial organisation and spatial processes of work. Economic geographers have played a significant role in analysing the spatial processes of the economy: where employers are located, where companies' inputs and outputs come from and go to, where their employees come from, and the connections between companies and organisations in localities and beyond. Massey (1984) added significantly to this analysis by arguing that space was an integral part of companies' decision-making, how

places mattered and, most importantly, how spatial processes and relations are what constitute the economy. From Massey we can argue that employment, in the sense of how companies and organisations organise where and how they employ their workers, is an inherently spatial practice. It has been sociologists, such as du Gay (1996), and geographers, like Allen and Pryke (1994), who have added to this debate on the spatial nature of employment practice, with analyses of the *internal* employment practices of companies. Allen and Pryke showed how in financial companies in the City of London, different sets of employees - financial dealers and cleaners, catering staff and security guards - are organised into, and occupy, different *spaces*, the dealing floor and the backrooms and the corridors, as well as being organised into different *times*, eight until five for the dealers, 'twilight' hours for the cleaners and all night for the security guards. Du Gay also notes how the different members of staff are organised in different spaces of commercial retail organisations - a system of organisation that has a precise economic (selling) purpose. Crucially, for both du Gay and Allen and Pryke, the roles/skills and time-spaces of the employees are closely linked to the production of their identities as (certain types of) employees.

Flexible employment methods, now increasingly used by all sectors of the economy, but perhaps particularly by the service sector (on which both du Gay, and Allen and Pryke base their work), have added a new dimension to the spatialisation of work practices. When we think of 'flexibility', most would probably think that it involves a reinvention or deconstruction of conventional employment times and spaces. Surely, part-time working and temporary contracts should lead to shifts in employment practices, creating a 'looser' organisational system. However, thinking spatially, we can consider there to be two types of flexible employment practices: flexibility where space and time are relatively fixed, and flexibility where space and time are looser.

In the former, even though there is significant part-time and temporary employment, the spaces and times in which the 'flexible' workers are employed are fixed, as rigid as employment 'pre-flexibility'. A good example of this is a 'call centre', a large, open plan office, with perhaps one hundred people staffing telephones for a company inquiry service. Most of the staff at such a site will be on flexible contracts, part-time,

temporary, and on shifts, but their hours of work (8 hour shifts, with timed coffee, meal and toilet breaks) and their space of work (a desk, phone head-set, and computer terminal) are precisely organised. The other type of flexible employment, the type usually portrayed by its advocates, is that in which time and space are largely managed by the employee (see du Gay, 1996), the driving factor of their employment being the work task. An example of this method of working is a manager in a large company, who has responsibility for a team of staff. The demands of the job mean that s/he does not work a standard day or week, and works in several spaces in the company, their own office, the offices of colleagues, the shop floor and at meetings outside the office.

Flexible employment, then, is a highly differentiated organisation of work, one that impacts on different employees in different ways, depending on their position in the spatio-temporal structure of the organisation, their role and their power. Most employees have some element of flexibility in their work, if not to the level in the two examples above and, arguably, this makes a qualitative difference to their employment. On *power* it could be argued that the spread of flexible employment practices rather than giving employees extra control over their work, is a reassertion of power, an attempt by employers to exert greater control over the organisation of employment. With the deregulation of the labour market in the UK, the withdrawal of many employees' rights and the weakening of the trades unions, employment has become individualised, a contract between individual employees and employers. Power relations in the flexible, individualised work process are, in general, heavily tilted in favour of employers, with only a limited number of senior employees achieving a strong position in relation to their employers. Flexible employment is thus a highly variegated, highly differentiated system of employment relations, underlain by power and organised through space and time.

Disability too can be thought of as a spatial practice. Earlier, I discussed the different ways in which the concept of 'disability' has been understood, concluding that while the 'social model' of disability (which explains disability as a social construction, rather than as an individual, biological condition) is a very useful and important interpretation, disability can be usefully thought of as an 'embodied process' combining social and biological elements. How can thinking spatially help us to develop this

understanding of disability? Studies of disability have told us, usefully, where disabled people are and what they do, but it is only recently that more sophisticated analyses of disability and space have emerged. The interests of geographers such as Butler and Bowlby (1997), Imrie (1996) and Golledge (1993) have forced us to think about how disabled people move through, interact with, and create space. Butler and Bowlby in particular make the important, and interesting, connection between how disabled people move within space, in their case visually-impaired people in public spaces, and the attitudes and understandings of disability. They have also taken the debate further. They talk of the disabled body as an active spatial practice: they argue that, “disabled people’s experience of being in public space is a complex interaction between self-image, social interactions with others, the physical and social structuring of the places visited and the bodily characteristics of the individual” (1997, p.421). Thinking about disabled people and disability in terms of space, then, from the space of the city and its inclusions and exclusions, to the space of the body and its movement, thought, interactions and decisions, pains and desires, allows us to think that people’s bodies, able and disabled, are produced through spatial practices and produce space themselves. It is important to state here that the disabled ‘body’ referred to above is the mind *and* body of a person, so the impaired body ‘moving through space’ is not just a physical body in motion, but a person - mind and body - interacting with the social environment. To conclude, I want to argue that to understand disability fully we must think about it spatially.

Finally in this section, I want to consider briefly how disability, the body and flexible employment may combine. I stated at the beginning of the Introduction that the focus of my work on disabled people and employment was the *process* of employment, i.e. what goes on within the job, rather than whether a disabled person is in employment or not. Flexible employment practices are very much concerned with the way that work is organised and managed. As such, it could be argued that the spread of flexible practices has altered, even transformed, the very process of employment. A situation may be developing which involves a series of relationships between disabled people in employment and flexible employment practices, relationships that could have several

outcomes, which may challenge the dominant understanding of disability, work and flexibility.

At the heart of flexible employment practices and disability, I would argue, is the body (the mind and the physical body). The changing nature of employment has placed the body of the employee at the centre of employment practice - it matters where a body is, what it does, where it does it, what it looks like and, moreover, it matters because it is an individual relationship between employer and employee that holds the flexible employment relation together. Recently, the body has come to the fore in the disability debate, particularly within geography. To think of disability as an embodied (experience and) process can add tremendously to the interpretation of disabled people's experiences, in daily life and in employment. This conceptualisation not only gives us a more realistic 'capture' of the experience of disabled people in flexible employment, but also allows us to get beyond the functional organisation of employment and begin to talk about the *meanings* of disability, flexibility and work. The body opens up the debate, as it reveals the complex, 'real' spaces of the relationship between flexible employment and disability.

* * * *

It has been argued in this Introduction that the 'body' and 'embodiment' are central to the analysis of disability and flexible employment. It now remains to outline what is meant in this research by the 'body' and 'embodiment', and why it is such a valuable theme to pursue.

I have argued above that with the increased use of flexible employment practices, people's bodies have increasingly been placed at the very centre of the employment process. Work has always been a very bodily process, with people's minds and physical bodies deeply involved in their employment. Flexible employment can be thought of as intensifying or heightening this existing set of processes. What is crucial, I argue, is understanding the body of a person as *involved* in work. Not a body that is simply being *used* to do a physical or mental task, but actively involved in the process of work - what is done, how it is done, what appearance it has - and, above all, what *meaning* it has. McDowell (1997) argues that "gender and class attributes are part and parcel of the formation of new ways of working in the post-industrial service economy ... In a growing

range of occupations in service-based economies, from fast food to fast money, the service and the product have become inseparable from the person providing it" (p.121). And, she continues, "It has become increasingly clear that organisational structures, institutional practices and employees' attitudes, social characteristics and bodily forms are restructured during periods of rapid economic change" (*ibid.*). It is clear from McDowell's argument that the 'body' is, at the same moment, a personal and a social thing. It is a flesh and blood and brain entity that a person *is* (not has, or lives in, but is what they are) and which interacts with other social and physical entities, such as, other people's bodies, places and spaces.

This may be an unfamiliar argument to put forward, as we are so tightly wedded to a notion of the body as *biological* and as separate from the mind. The recent theory of *embodiment* attempts to reclaim or rescue the body from this notion. Firstly, it challenges the idea that the body is purely biological and that our conditions and lives are somehow determined by our biological make-up and, secondly, it argues for a rethinking of the body and mind as an integrated whole. It is just as crucial to state, however, that I do not see the body as solely a *social construction*, as could be inferred from the above criticism of biological determinism.

What the body is, what it means and how it works, cannot be explained neatly or completely by a social constructionist analysis. I see the body as neither purely biological nor purely social, so a person's body and therefore a person, is neither determined by their physical or biological make-up - their bodily parts, the hormones or fluids that flow through their body, the strings of DNA at the core of our cells - nor are the understandings and meanings of the body determined by the social and cultural context. Instead, I see the body as absorbing both sets of processes - biological and social - and, crucially, as an active agent, reacting to both sets of processes, so changing its development and meaning. So, the body is not a fixed and stable entity, but rather a continually changing phenomenon, both in terms of its 'physicalness' and in terms of its meaning and interpretation. Pile and Thrift (1995) have usefully described the body as a 'site of capture', a place where social and biological processes build up over time, are transformed and are pushed out again into the social world. The notion of the body as a

'site of capture' is useful because it allows us to think about how a person's identity, their relationship with other actors and processes in the social world (such as employment), develops and changes over time. This 'accretion' of personal experience - the social actions of others and social and physical processes and events - in the body of the person, means that a person, their actions and identities, is a long-term process. Who a person 'is' and what they mean, to themselves and to others, and to society in general, develops and 'beds down' over time. Any attempt to shift away from or break up this accretion is a difficult project, as there is already so much 'there' of a person. This does not make change impossible, however, just a slower and more complex process than some would imagine. Any change in a person's identity, or understanding of themselves, will have to take with it the accumulated baggage of the body's 'history'. What theories of the body can do, then, is to provide a possible way of approaching what a person is that takes into account, indeed has as its central concern, the complex reality of a person's life, past and present, and the embodied nature of their life.

The above development of an embodied approach to identity can be usefully applied to disability. The dominant individual or medical understanding of disability and the alternative social understanding roughly equate to the biological determinist and social constructionist understandings of the body, i.e. disability and the body as determined by the physical state of a person, and disability and the body as meaning different things in different social contexts. Both understandings of disability, therefore, tend to ignore the interaction between the biological and the social. And this lack of attention to the body has important effects, as the issue of disability is often seen either purely in terms of the biological state of a person (such as immobility or lack of sight) or in terms of the social conditions (such as lack of access and discrimination). While I argue throughout the research that while the social model, in its location of responsibility in society allows for the possibility of change, it has tended to ignore the presence of the body (and for good reason, as disabled people have for so long been understood as being determined by their bodies). An embodied approach to disability allows us to think of disability as an identity, a meaning that develops over time and becomes something that has a 'presence' in the person. This *does not* mean that the situation cannot change, that a

person is stuck with their biological condition, as change is an integral part of the embodied understanding of disability. What it *does* mean is that disability is understood as a material thing, an identity that has a reality, a social construction that has 'come into being'. This begins to get over the exclusion of impairment and the associated difficulties and pain that have characterised many presentations of the social model.

The embodied approach to disability attempts to present a 'materialist' understanding of disability, one that sees disability primarily as a social, discriminatory category, but one that integrates the physicalness of impairment and acknowledges the body. It is the continuous interaction between people (and their bodies) and the changing social and economic environment that produces what disability *is*.

Thinking 'bodily' about disability also allows an extension of the discussion to think about 'ability'. The debate around binary dualisms and the inherent power relation between them has largely been concerned with issues of race and gender. The positions in this debate are, on the one hand, that men and women and black and white people, are distinctly different, biologically, but more crucially socially, and are locked into their binary opposition by strong power relations of dominance and subordination. On the other hand, there is the increasingly popular poststructuralist stance that these binary oppositions are socially constructed, and really men and women and black and white people have more in common and have more internal variation than they have differences. There is instead a non-categorical, blurred set of identities, that are constantly in flux and being continually negotiated. In terms of disability and ability, this means that there is no certain, fixed notion of what disability is and no fixed notion of what ability is. Rather, there is a loose collection of identities, involving different people with uncertainties about themselves, which occasionally come together around the foci of 'ability' and 'disability'. But there is certainly no clear, fixed idea about what disability and ability are and what they mean.

An embodied understanding of identity approaches things rather differently. It argues that being able-bodied or disabled cannot dissolve as easily as the post-structuralists might argue. These identities have material form. They exist in Government policy, in the media, in employer attitudes, and in political movements. They may be

highly contested, very differently thought about and have completely contrasting thinking behind them, but they still exist. And any conceptualisation of disability must recognise that, even if only for particular purposes - what can be called 'strategic essentialism' - these definitions, identities and meanings have a presence. An embodied approach can possibly allow a way of 'fixing' the identities of 'ability' and 'disability' in a way that also enables a continual negotiation of their meaning. Through embodiment, we can see that being able or disabled (or more precisely having that identity) is something that 'builds up' and develops over time and perhaps can be described as an 'impermanent fixity'. This identity, however, has a very material sense to it, that is not simply biological, but is socially and culturally inscribed and which has changed the person, mentally and physically. Our bodies are marked, or in Foucault's conceptualisation, 'imprinted', with our identities (1977). This does not mean that we are stuck with our identities and unable to change them. Rather, who we are and who we are in relation to society - our identities - (and this changes, of course, as the definitions and ideas of what ability and disability are change) is simultaneously a solid and a fluid concept. So, people and ideas coalesce around certain foci and then disperse again (as meanings change), reforming around new foci. However, the movement between these foci is not easy, as one is restrained by the previous foci and obstructed by contradictions in the path to the new foci. Ability and disability *are* social constructions, but they very real and embodied too and so cannot easily be changed or shed.

In using the embodied approach to identity, therefore, I am arguing for the deconstruction of the fixed, binary opposition of identity and arguing for a new, hybrid sense of identity (see Bhabha, 1994). But what an embodied understanding does is to 'ground' the hybrid sense of identities, as it recognises that identity is something that, although a social and cultural construction, is also very real and bodily. For disability and ability, then, a person with an impairment can, in the hybrid sense, identify themselves as not disabled (but also not able-bodied), yet they are still involved in the disability-ability identity debate and have to negotiate their position accordingly.

The research will argue additionally that 'impairment', although often thought of as the physical or mental deficiency that the person has and more recently thought of as a

social construction (see Crow, 1996), is more accurately described as a person's 'bodily state'. This description allows *everyone* to be included in the discussion, as we all have a body and it also makes it very clear that we are dealing with a bodily issue. However, although impairment is a social construction, some people, with particular bodily states, do have issues of pain, discomfort, and movement to deal with. These are very real, material, bodily issues and cannot be explained away by describing them as a social construction. It has been argued that everyone has an impaired body of some form, such as wearing glasses, a bad back or a poor memory. This is certainly true, as no-one has a perfect body (for example, wearing glasses was, until recently, understood as a significant issue), but there is no dispute that some people have a significantly greater degree of issues related to their bodily state. An embodied approach to impairment grounds the necessary deconstruction of the 'impairment' term (and its continual change in meaning) in the reality of bodily imperfection and weakness, i.e. although we can argue that the notion of 'impairment' is a social construction, many people do have bodily states that affect their ability to do things.

So how, at this point, may we summarise this thinking about disability, ability and impairment? Disability and ability can still be thought of as existing as identities, but they are increasingly being challenged by poststructuralist thinking around hybridity (which itself is a response to events in society, which have asked serious questions about binary identities). The disability and ability identities are in a continual state of change, as contested notions of what they are is the subject of much debate. But engulfed within this debate and negotiation are real people with real bodily states who require some sense of who they are, so people continue to rally round the identities of disability (and around ability too, although it is usually unspoken) to stake a claim to an identity and as way of gaining rights and benefits, and to resist dominant notions of what 'disability' means. An embodied approach to disability allows this to happen as it can encompass both the social (de)construction of the terms ability and disability and the reality of people's bodily states, by recognising the close and continuous interaction between social and biological processes within the context of significant identity and political relations of power.

* * * *

Finally, this research will adopt an embodied approach to disability in employment. It has been argued above that there are distinct advantages in using an embodied approach - one that sees the body as central to a person's identity and to their social relations, including work - to consider disability and employment. An embodied approach enables one to include the many 'threads' which make up 'the disability experience', and what employment *is*. And, in so doing, it enables one to combine different understandings of disability and employment. Additionally, the rigid ways that disability and employment are categorised (disability as able or disabled, and nothing possible inbetween; employment as either full-time work or flexible) is disrupted by thinking about the body. Bodies make people what they are and so an embodied approach reflects what people are really like in their understandings of disability and employment. It makes a lot of sense, then, to consider an embodied approach to the relationship between disability and employment. An embodied approach is a way of getting to the heart of the complex and changing relation between concept of 'disability' and the new forms of employment.

What an embodied approach to disability and flexible employment actually means is best explained using an example. Consider a disabled employee in a branch of a large company. This person can be considered as 'disabled' because in the current thinking about bodily state, their visual impairment, for example, is serious enough to cross the boundary between able-bodiedness and disability. So, this person has a bodily state which, in the present dominant understanding makes them impaired and disabled. This is the interpretation presented by the individual model of disability. The social model would say that the person's impairment has been turned into a disability by the social and physical barriers put up by the labour market in general and by the company they are employed by in particular. The two models of disability would also offer different solutions: the individual model would see the situation as one for the disabled person to work out, to adapt themselves as best they could, using equipment if necessary, to the job and the company, whereas the social model would state that it was the responsibility of the company to make the job and the company accessible, in all senses, to the abilities of the person.

Keeping in mind both understandings of the disability-employment relation, set out above, we can now move on to think about how these relate to the situation of our example employee. The crucial question to ask of any interpretation is how it relates to and helps to explain the situation of the person or people it is referring to. The individual model of disability does recognise the physical nature of the disabled person: it does say that they are visually-impaired and that they have difficulty seeing. But it tends to ignore all of the other parts of the situation, the organisation of work, the discrimination of the employer and fellow employees, the problems of getting to work and so on. Also, and perhaps more significantly, it offers little in the way of changing the situation as it focuses so heavily on the individual, so any change has to come from them (and not from the employer, or society more generally). In contrast, a social interpretation takes into account the attitudes of the employer and fellow employees and makes a large play of the barriers of the organisation of work and the transport system. What the social interpretation tends to leave to one side, however, for the very reason that its focus is on society, is the complexities and contradictions of the individual work situation. So, both models offer something in the analysis of disability in employment and in particular for an employee with a visual impairment. They both offer some connection to the reality of employment and offer the possibility of change.

Yet, the embodied approach to disability and employment may be a better way to capture the reality of employment for this visually-impaired person in this large company, and for disabled people more generally. The embodied approach emphasises the importance of reflecting what a person is actually experiencing in work and at the same time making this experience a very social and not an individual thing. So for the visually-impaired person working in the corporation, their employment is a complex mix of personal experiences - difficulties (including the pain and practical issues of impairment) and successes - and the context in which they do the job - the organisation of work, attitudes and so on. The way of holding together these inextricably connected elements (they are indeed one thing) is, I would argue, the *body*, and in particular the body as a site of capture and an active social entity. The personal and the social experiences of employment come together in the individual's body, which then actively reacts and

responds to these processes and continues the process of the negotiation around employment and meaning (of work and disability). For our employee, their day-to-day experience is marked by 'normal' working practice, that is, getting on with the job, peppered with problems of access, getting to work, getting around the workplace, some comments and misunderstandings with fellow staff (including some outright discrimination), the use of technology to do the job and so on. This is the reality of work for most people who would be classified as disabled. The embodied approach can capture this reality by focusing on this day-to-day employment experience, while still including the importance of the impairment and social aspects of disability.

* * * *

The research presented here involved a four phase empirical strategy. The four phases attempted to capture the complexity of the situation and experience of disabled people in the flexible labour market. The first phase involved in-depth interviews with what I have called 'key actors' in the disability and employment arena. The aim was three fold: to get an impression of what the important issues were in the area of disability and employment, to discover how these organisations understood and represented disability and employment, and to obtain details of the policies and practices in which they were involved. This first phase provided the context within which processes of employment and disability are played out. The second phase investigated these processes through a study of three large service sector companies, nationally and in Manchester. Interviews with managers and personnel officers, plus analysis of documentary material, allowed a picture to be built up of the processes and practices of flexible employment within the companies. In particular, the spatial organisation of disabled people in flexible employment and the deeply embodied nature of this process, was investigated and discussed. The third phase was a study of the local context of Manchester and its possible effect on the actions of the companies. Lastly, interviews were conducted with a mixture of able-bodied and disabled employees in the three companies to find out about the jobs they did, where and when they worked, and their understanding of disability and ability.

* * * *

The research presented here is divided into three parts. The first part comprises two chapters, 'Disability and employment: the issues', and "'Defining moments': the two World Wars and disability, the 'body' and employment'. These two chapters cover, respectively, the situation and interpretation of disabled people in employment, and how the three key themes of the research - disability, the 'body', and flexible employment - were 'defined' by the events and processes of the two World Wars. The second part of the research develops these three themes, in three chapters, 'Understanding 'disability'', 'Disability and the 'body'' and 'Flexibility and disability'. Each chapter introduces and explains the particular subject area and connects it into the overall argument of the research, that of the embodied nature of disabled people in flexible employment. In the third part of the research, the empirical work is introduced and analysed. Chapter Six explains the methodological approach adopted, while Chapter Seven is concerned with the general issues of 'discourse' in relation to disability and flexible employment as they emerged from the discussions with disability and employment organisations, and how an embodied approach provides a fresh way to consider these issues. Chapter Eight uses an embodied approach to focus on the three companies and how disability and employment are worked through spatially and temporally in the workplace, and the consequences for the disabled employees.

Chapter One Disability and employment: the issues

1.1 Introduction

This research focuses on the employment situation of disabled people through the study of disabled people *in employment*. There are theoretical and methodological reasons for doing this, which were explained in the Introduction, but this does not preclude a discussion of the more general position of disabled people in relation to employment, which in many cases means *unemployment*. This is the intention of this chapter.

Employment has always been a central part of the disability debate. There are several reasons for this: the centrality of work to the (Western) way of life, the independence that employment can bring, the psychological benefits it is claimed work can give through social interaction, the desire of the Government to reduce the welfare 'burden' through transferring disabled people from community care and the benefits system into employment, and the wish of many disabled people to be part of everyday social life, which includes employment. Overall, disabled people are seen to be disadvantaged in relation to employment, and should have an equal chance to share in its financial and social benefits. More fundamentally, employment is a key 'marker' or symbol of 'normality' in Western society, and the separation or bringing together of disabled people and employment reflects the still unresolved and highly contested issue of disabled people as 'normal' or 'abnormal' and, crucially, how they are *constructed* as such in relation to employment.

This chapter will investigate the issue of disability and employment in several ways. Firstly, it will sketch the 'big story' of disability and employment, in an attempt to present the current (and near past) situation. Secondly, the major legislative and government policies towards disability and employment will be outlined, and an analysis made of their inherent philosophy (the latest phase in the legislative evolution has been a potential revolution in the form of the Disability Discrimination Act, the first piece of anti-discrimination legislation related to disability). Thirdly, the chapter will develop a

series of theoretical understandings on disability and employment; this initial exploration will set up the theoretical debate for the rest of the research.

1.2 The 'big story'

It is difficult, if not impossible, to get a *clear* picture of disabled people in employment. There are several reasons for this: firstly, there is no clear or agreed definition of 'disability'; secondly, there has been a lack of good quality data collection and analysis regarding disability (partly due to the unclear definition, but largely due to the general lack of interest in disability amongst employment researchers); thirdly, many people who have impairments do not want to be seen as 'disabled', because of, as they see it, the social discrimination and stigma. However, it is still useful and important to sketch a *broad* picture of the position of disabled people in employment.

1.2.1 *Disabled people in employment*

The last comprehensive survey of disabled people in (and out of) employment was conducted over 10 years ago, by the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys (OPCS). The fourth report of the 'OPCS surveys of disability in Great Britain' showed that there were just over six million disabled people in Britain; two million of these were of working age, but only 700,000 were in paid employment, about 31 per cent (Martin *et al.*, 1989). Of those out of employment, 34 per cent were 'permanently unable to work', and 16 per cent were not working, about half of whom were looking for work (7 per cent). A smaller survey by Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR) used a different definition of disability ('occupational handicap'), but discovered a very similar proportion of employed disabled people, 32 per cent (Prescott-Clarke, 1990). The most up-to-date (but not comprehensive) information on disability and employment, however, comes from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), a quarterly publication. Its Winter 1995/6 edition showed a figure of 31.5 per cent for the proportion of disabled people employed.

While there seems to be clear agreement that just under a third of disabled people are in employment, this may have more to do with good fortune than a robustness of the data. The reason is that each of the surveys quoted had a different methodology and, more

crucially, a different *definition* of 'disability'. The OPCS based its definition of disability on the World Health Organisation (WHO) classification⁵, i.e. disability is "any restriction or lack of ability, resulting from impairment, to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being" (quoted in Berthoud *et al*, 1993, p.4). The WHO classification was itself based on a previous OPCS survey of disabled people in Britain (research conducted in 1968, published as Harris, 1971). So, there was broad agreement in Britain and the Western world about the understanding of 'disability'. The SCPR research used a more specific definition, 'occupational handicap', defined as anyone of working age who is economically active, and who has a health or disability problem that might lead to occupational handicap (see WHO classification definition of handicap, Footnote 5). This is clearly a different group of people from disabled people, as it excludes those disabled people who are not economically active, and only relates a person's impairment to their ability to work (i.e. not all disabled people have impairments which have potential consequences for employment). The LFS asks 'Do you have any of the health problems or disabilities listed on this card?', and if so, 'Does this/do any of these health problems or disabilities limit the kind of paid work you can do?'. This is different from both the OPCS and SCPR definitions, as it is more specific about the type of disability/impairment, and is based on a short-term assessment, noting implicitly that disability can change over time.

None of the three surveys quoted above can provide indisputable data on the number of disabled people in employment. Because of its very nature - a phenomenon that is constantly changing in meaning and description, and understood in different ways - it will never be possible to have an 'accurate' set of data on disability and employment.

⁵ Wood (1981) devised the 'International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps' (ICIDH). It is a three-fold classification:

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|--------------|---|
| 'Impairment' | Any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function. |
| 'Disability' | Any restriction or lack of ability, resulting from impairment, to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. |
| 'Handicap' | A disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal, depending on age, sex, social, and cultural factors, for that individual. |

And perhaps it is not desirable either, because by accepting the absence of precise data collection we are recognising that it is not possible to precisely connect a person and a disability/impairment to employment, and so change is possible.

Two issues can be drawn out of this initial discussion. Firstly, disability cannot be understood as a fixed entity. Despite the efforts of the surveys referred to above to 'pin it down', disability is clearly a changing phenomenon, both in social meaning and definitional terms and in personal terms for someone with an impairment. Secondly, there is an important debate around the connection between disability and employment. What are the processes that operate within and between disability and employment; that is, those that make employment happen or not for disabled people? I would like to argue that the process of employment and the process of disability operate quite differently, only meeting at certain moments and in certain spaces.

1.2.2 Occupations

If we take the third of disabled people *in* employment and make a number of comparisons with *all* people in employment, we can see that disabled people have a significantly poorer experience of work. In terms of occupations, disabled people are over-represented in lower skilled employment. The OPCS report (1989) found that 37 per cent of disabled men had non-manual jobs, compared with 46 per cent of all men, and 18 per cent had professional or managerial jobs, compared with 28 per cent of all men. The proportion of disabled women workers in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs was 37 per cent, compared with 29 per cent of women in general. In the Labour Force Survey (LFS) of Winter 1995/6, the same figures (admittedly done on different statistical bases, as shown above) show a slight widening of the occupational divisions: 42.7 per cent of disabled men in non-manual jobs, compared with 52 per cent of all men in the same posts (an increase in the difference from 9 to 10 percentage points) and a continuing gap between disabled men and all men in professional jobs - 3 per cent of disabled men, compared to 8 per cent of all men in 1985, 3 per cent compared to 9 per cent in the 1995/6 LFS.

As well as showing the relatively poor position of many disabled people in employment, the above figures highlight the differences between the employment

experiences of disabled men and women. The OPCS and LFS figures both show that although there are differences between disabled men and disabled women - in particular, a higher proportion of disabled male than female professionals (3 to 1 per cent, OPCS; 4.8 to 1.9 per cent, LFS) - the differences are less than between non-disabled men and women; comparative figures are, for professional posts 8 to 1 per cent (OPCS; 9 to 2 per cent, LFS) in favour of men, and 36 to 11 per cent (LFS) for skilled non-manual employment. The differences are not large, but they could suggest that for disabled men and women, the issue of their *disability* is more significant in employment than their gender. It is not clear why this is so, but I would like to suggest that disability and employment are, for many employers and society more generally, understood as mutually exclusive or oppositional. That is, there is a difficulty, in the dominant way that disability is presently understood, in thinking of disability and employment as happening together. This is transferred into employment decision-making in the form of disability becoming a major factor in the employment of a person, whether the disability will have an impact on their employment or not.

Where there *is* a greater difference, if only a small one, between disabled men and women than between all men and women, is in relation to *part-time* employment. The LFS research showed that 12 per cent of disabled men and 52 per cent of disabled women were in part-time employment, a difference of 40 percentage points; for all employees, the comparative figures are 6 and 43 per cent, a difference of 37 points. So, although women in general are more likely than men to be in part-time employment, reflecting the way that the labour market has changed, disabled women are even *more* likely to be in part-time employment. As Chapter Five will argue, part-time employment, a rapidly expanding phenomenon, is a paradox for many disabled employees, as it offers job opportunities for those who cannot work an eight hour day, five day week, but offers usually lower wages in return, and what is more likely to be a job with lower occupational status (very few professional and managerial jobs are part-time), with poorer job security.

Berthoud *et al* (1993) argue that the lack of opportunities for flexible hours and days offered by employers has encouraged many disabled people to establish their own

businesses. The SCPR report, to which Berthoud *et al* refer, shows that a higher proportion of disabled people compared to non-disabled people are in self-employment, and are much more likely to work at home (20 per cent, compared to 1 per cent of all self-employed).

Flexible employment practices, such as part-time working and self-employment, are now being heavily used in certain sectors of the UK economy. The debate at the core of the research is what impact such practices have had on the employment opportunities and experiences of disabled people. From the initial evidence above it can be seen that there is a slightly higher proportion of disabled people in part-time employment than non-disabled people and slightly more in self-employment. However, this can be understood in two quite different ways: either flexible employment is offering increased opportunities for disabled people to work, or disabled people are only able to get lower quality employment, which part-time work often is. The key then, is not what type of job it is but how the job is organised, what the pay is, and how stable it is, i.e. what is the *process* of the employment. This is really the key issue for disabled people (as it is for all employees).

1.2.3 *Earnings*

The over-representation of disabled people in lower status occupations has an impact on average earnings. The SCPR survey compared the incomes of the disabled people it interviewed with data from the New Earnings Survey (1989). For full-time employment, 13 per cent of disabled male employees earned less than £100 a week, compared to 2 per cent of all male employees. Altogether 63 per cent of disabled men received under £200 a week, while only about half of that proportion, 37 per cent, of all men received the same amount. At the other end of the pay scale, 5 per cent of disabled men earned weekly over £400, compared to 12 per cent of all men. However, it is not just the significant presence of disabled people in unskilled and semi-skilled employment that results in their lower wages. Berthoud *et al* (1993), using the OPCS data and the Family Expenditure Survey of the same year (1985), argue that occupational status is responsible for only a small proportion of the earnings disadvantage experienced by disabled people.

Rather, the significant difference in earnings can be linked *directly* to disability. Blaxter (1976) quoted a young disabled man, “if you get a job as a disabled person, you only get the disabled pay, even if you’re working beside other men getting twice as much and doing the same job as them” (quoted in Berthoud *et al* 1993, p.31). There is substantial evidence that, in the same way that many women are still paid less than their male colleagues for the same work (despite the long-term existence of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equal Opportunities Commission), disabled people are often paid less than the non-disabled people in the same employment. The disparity is more marked for male disabled employees, with no statistically significant difference between non-disabled and disabled women employees (Berthoud *et al*, 1993).

So, although disabled people receive lower earnings because of their generally lower employment positions, there is a significant element of the difference in wages that can be connected to the presence of the disability. This can perhaps be connected to the dominant, oppositional, understanding of disability and employment, that sees disabled people in employment as an exception to a powerful rule. To pay people less on the basis of such an understanding is not understood as unjustified.

1.2.4 Variability in impairment/disability and the ‘severity scale’

The Introduction noted that ‘disability’ is a highly variable and constantly changing phenomenon. So, to speak of ‘disabled people’ as a collective, homogeneous group is inaccurate and potentially undermining of the campaign for equality. The OPCS survey attempted (however unsuccessfully and inappropriately) to account for the great variety in disabled people’s impairments and the relative impacts on employment experience. The OPCS research devised a ‘severity scale’ of impairment/disability, with particular values assigned to particular ‘inabilities’. For example, on ‘Locomotion’, if a person ‘cannot walk at all’, this is given a severity score of ‘11.5’; at the other end of this particular scale, if a person ‘cannot walk 400 yards without stopping or severe discomfort’, a score of ‘0.5’ is assigned. There are similar scales for ‘seeing’, ‘continence’, ‘intellectual function’ and several other categories, each linking a ‘score’ to a physical or mental ‘inability’.

The OPCS report on employment used the severity scales to show how differences in 'level' of disability/impairment affected employment opportunities. Using these statistics it showed how the figures for the most significant groups of working age disabled people, those 'working' and those 'permanently unable to work', fell and rose, respectively, very markedly as the severity of impairment increased. That is, less severely disabled people were more likely to be economically active, while the more severely disabled were more likely to say that they were 'permanently unable to work'.

The Berthoud *et al* analysis (1993) of the OPCS data connected occupational status to severity values and made some stark findings: for example, the chances of a disabled male employee being in a managerial or professional post were about a third lower than those of a non-disabled man if he had a low severity value, but about a half lower if he had a score in the middle of the severity range. Moreover, male employees with a relatively minor disability were no more likely to be found in semi- or unskilled manual occupations than if they had not been disabled at all. However, the probability of being in a lower-level occupation increased with each increase in severity level. The concept of the 'severity scale' helps us to understand a little better the true complexity of the employment-disability relationship, i.e. the employment experience is not the same for all disabled people, some are much more disadvantaged than others, many are largely unaffected.

The technique of the severity scale, however, has been heavily criticised by several prominent disabled academics. Abberley (1991) attacked the overall approach of the OPCS survey as well as the severity scales, in particular the form of the questions, i.e. the questions focus on the individual disabled person and their 'problems', with no attention being paid to the social and cultural contexts of people's lives. For example, one of the first questions on the interview schedule was, 'Can you tell me what is wrong with you?', and another question concerned employment, 'Does your health problem/disability affect your work in any way at present?' (Martin *et al*, 1988, quoted in Oliver, 1990, p.7). Oliver (1990) argues that the questions plus the method in which they are collected (face-to-face interviews, one researcher and one disabled person) creates a belief in the disabled person that the problems they experience in everyday life are due to their individual

functional limitations. He argues that you could turn the questions around to focus on society, for example the first question quoted above would become, 'Can you tell me what is wrong with society?', and the second question, 'Does the way that your work is organised make your disability a problem?'. Abberley echoes Oliver's concerns that the form of the questions 'individualises' disability, and that the conducting of the OPCS survey itself is an oppressive process, as it does nothing to advance the struggle of disabled people for equality, instead reinforcing ideas of passivity in those interviewed, and these ideas are then transferred to the public and political domain.

Abberley thought the severity scales particularly damaging to the cause of disabled people. He had two reasons: firstly, who were the 'experts' that the OPCS asked to draw up the severity scales, and how well qualified were they to make such judgements? Secondly, there is the issue over what exactly the scaling is attempting to measure - is it impairment or disability? This second reason goes to the heart of the disability debate: the OPCS survey, and the severity scales in particular, were based on the premise that disability is very closely related to impairment, i.e. disability is the inability to do a certain action and it is due to a certain impairment. Abberley and Oliver, in their critique of the survey and the severity scales, understood it quite differently, i.e. impairment as quite separate from disability, the former the physical or mental state, the latter the imposed disadvantage of a discriminatory society on the impaired person. So, the Berthoud *et al* analysis (1993), while still holding factually, would be interpreted differently: the reason for the male disabled person with a severe impairment having half the chance of being in a professional or managerial post than a non-disabled person would be due to poor access and discrimination by the employers, a practice that increases in forcefulness as an impairment becomes more severe.

This sub-section has made some important points in relation to the overall argument of the research. First, there is a clearly a huge variation in both the experience of impairment and disability and in the interaction of disabled people and employment. Because of this, no general statements can be made about disability and employment, only that there is a complex process of negotiation, discrimination, opportunity and work practices operating in the context of a strong set of power relations, one of which is that

there is a dominant oppositional understanding of disability and employment. The second point follows on from the first, that is that disability/impairment does have an effect on employment. Even with medical, technological and social intervention, the experience of disabled people in employment - whatever the severity of their impairment - will be different. It is important to recognise that the employment position of disabled people is a complex combination of the restrictions of impairment and the social understanding of disability. And, third, this discussion has shown that while there is no causal link between impairment and disability, there is most definitely *a* link. Impairment and disability are connected, as the Introduction suggested, through a series of complex relations, mediated within and through the body, the disability being a process of materialisation involving biological and social processes.

1.2.5 Unemployment amongst disabled people

The first sub-section stated that approximately 31 per cent of disabled people of working age are in employment. The remaining 69 per cent are not of course all unemployed, as this implies (in labour market terms) that all are available for and seeking work. This is certainly not the case, with only 7 per cent looking for work, and a further 8 per cent wanting to work but either not looking or too ill to search. The OPCS survey had an unemployment rate for disabled workers of 23 per cent, with a higher proportion of disabled men than women unemployed (27 to 20 per cent). The SCPR report came up with a similar figure, 22 per cent, despite a different research method. It is almost impossible to compare these figures with the Government monthly unemployment figures, because no comprehensive data is kept on disabled unemployed people. A Department of Employment report has an attempt, however, by using the 1989 LFS and showing that an unemployment rate for disabled people of 20.5 per cent can be compared to a rate of 5.4 per cent for all economically-active people (1990). It is also difficult to compare because for disabled people the unemployment, or more precisely non-employment, experience is much more complex than for non-disabled people. The OPCS survey found that 73 per cent of disabled people not in employment were 'not available for work', the vast majority (46 per cent) of whom were, according to the survey,

‘unable’ to do any paid work. The only other significant group of disabled people not in work were those (again according to the survey) who ‘don’t want or need work’ (disabled people are also much more likely to be unemployed for long periods, making re-entry into the labour market even harder, Barnes, 1991).

The above sub-section, showing the significant disadvantage disabled people experience *in* employment, may provide a large part of the explanation for the high level of disabled people not in the labour market. The lack of job opportunities, particularly in high status positions, the high level of *underemployment* of talented and qualified disabled people, the relatively low wages, the lack of opportunities for alternative forms of working such as flexible hours and homeworking, plus the generally poor access and discrimination, all put pressure on disabled people in the labour market and many choose to reject the path of this constant struggle. For many disabled people, then, there is a situation of either being in employment or not being available for employment. To be unemployed and actively seeking employment does not seem to be a common option for many disabled people, for financial and personal reasons.

The system of social security benefits at present actively encourages disabled people *not* to be in employment, for by taking on any significant employment a disabled person will lose large amounts of benefit (for housing, transport, health care and so on), often more than the income generated by the employment. Barnes (1991) extends this by arguing that the benefit system is symbolic of society’s understanding of disability and employment, that is, disabled people should not be in employment; he says, “disabled people are aware of the economic and social pressures placed on them *not* to look for work” (p.64). Those disabled people in employment are also more likely to retire early, on a package, usually for ‘health reasons’ (Glendinning, 1991). According to the OPCS study, 31 per cent of disabled men, and 16 per cent of disabled women retire before they reach 65 and 60 years, respectively. For many disabled people employment, or even active unemployment, is often experienced in spite of the social barriers. The understanding that disabled people and active labour market involvement are mutually impossible is a very real process and excludes many disabled people from employment.

1.2.6 *'Sheltered' employment*

The OPCS report on employment noted that of those 27 per cent available for work, 4 per cent could only do part-time work, 17 per cent had not found a suitable job, and the remaining 5 per cent considered that they could only do 'sheltered work'. Although this is a low percentage, it is still significant, and in number terms, 14,000 disabled people are employed in sheltered workshops (Barnes, 1991). 'Sheltered employment' was introduced in its modern sense (although, of course, many disabled people had been in institutions such as workhouses in the last century) in Section 15 of the 1944 Disabled Persons (Employment) Act. It enabled the setting up of sheltered workshops which would be run as non-profit making companies subsidised by public funds (Lonsdale, 1986). They are run by local authorities, voluntary organisations (such as the disability charities 'Mencap' and 'Action for Blind People') and most significantly 'Remploy', a Government-sponsored, non-profit making company set up in 1945, which employed 9,334 disabled people in 1995 (The Guardian, 1997a). Sheltered employment was intended for people with 'severe' impairments who were considered unable to obtain 'open', or mainstream, employment. The decisions are made by Disability Resettlement Officers (DROs, now renamed Disability Advisers as part of the Employment Service 'Placement, Assessment and Counselling (PAC) Teams') - disabled people who wish to work are assessed by the DRO/PAC Team and classified as either 'Section 1' or 'Section 2', the former suitable for 'open' employment (i.e. in the general, integrated labour market), the latter suitable only for sheltered employment. There is no category inbetween and little option for change in status or movement between the two 'sections'. This classification of disabled people into two strict 'types' is important to the overall argument in three ways: firstly, it has a very real effect on the people involved, because a single decision can permanently change a person's experience of employment; secondly, because it makes a very clear distinction between what is 'right' and normal, i.e. open employment, and what is 'wrong' and not normal, i.e. sheltered employment; thirdly, and more positively, it recognises that for some disabled people support is necessary in employment.

There is a great variety of work done in sheltered employment, but most people are employed in the manufacture of consumer products. Remploy's output includes bedding, knitwear and furniture, and it also does assembly and packaging work for other companies. Its products are sold in the open market, not only through charity shops and similar outlets, whereas 'Action for Blind People' make cheque book covers and office materials for a major banking company. There has been a shift in the purpose and methods of much sheltered employment since the mid-1970s. Before then it was seen as a 'humanitarian' exercise, its primary function social not economic. One of its original intentions, too, was to provide a rehabilitative 'step' to open employment, seen as the 'real' employment experience that all disabled people should ideally move into. Since that time there have been increased Government demands for sheltered employment companies to be more cost effective, and even competitive. At the same time and particularly since 1990, the Department of Employment has gradually started to run down sheltered employment and introduce alternatives. The main reason is cost, but more fundamentally a concern with the quality of the work experience and training (or lack of it), the income of employees (they are "some of the poorest wage earners in the country", Barnes, 1991, p.72), and the morality of 'sheltering' or 'hiding' disabled people away from 'open' or 'real' employment. The promotion of disabled people in employment is now largely through 'normal' employment, or not at all. Although this is generally positive, because of the poor conditions and low pay of many sheltered workshops, for some disabled people such supported employment is what they demand (The Guardian, 1997a).

This is partly recognised by the 'Sheltered Placement Scheme', introduced in 1985 and significantly expanded since then, which aims to provide a link into open employment for disabled people who are considered unable to achieve employment without support (people classified as 'section 2', as described above). The Department of Employment argues that the Sheltered Placement Scheme is an acceptable and positive alternative to 'designated' and sheltered employment (Department of Employment,

1990).⁶ The scheme works as follows: a 'sponsor', usually a local authority or disability charity, employs a disabled person and then 'sub-contracts' them out to a company. The company provides employment, training and so on, in a 'normal' job, and pays the sponsor a fee related to the 'productivity' of the person (for example, if a person is assessed to be able to do 60 per cent of the job if done by an able-bodied worker, then the company pays the sponsor 60 per cent of the wages) with the remainder paid by the sponsor, so the disabled person receives the full wage. The Supported Placement Scheme has received much praise for attempting to 'bridge the gap' between more severely impaired people and employment. However, the number of places available on the scheme is limited and a person's opportunity is decided upon by the disability adviser in the PAC Team.⁷ Also, sponsored workers often do not receive the same employment benefits, such as sick pay and redundancy packages, as other employees, as they are employed by the sponsor, not by the company (Mainstream, 1990). The 'Same difference' research (1989) and Dutton *et al* (1989) have shown that sponsored workers are often in low-skilled, low-status jobs, and many are paid less than their counterparts employed by Remploy. Moreover, few move from supported employment to open employment, one of the central aims of the scheme, partly because few companies provide comprehensive training. The scheme is important because it recognises the support that some disabled people need to be in employment and the combination of personal restriction and social barriers that need to be dealt with for this to happen. Also, it raises the issue of the *individual* conceptualisation of disability which is part of the dominant understanding of disability. This sees the negotiation over employment as a one-to-one, individual issue between the disabled person and the organisation. Further, the issue of employment becomes something that has to be 'worked out' against the grain

⁶ 'Designated employment' was one element of the 1944 Disabled People (Employment) Act (see section 1.3). It stated that two specific occupations - electric lift operator and car park attendant - should be set aside for registered disabled people. Further, any disabled people employed in these jobs could not be included in the 3 per cent for the employment Quota (see section 1.3).

⁷ Research by 'Same difference' (1989) has shown that the small number of places has led in some cases to the exclusion of disabled people with 'less acceptable' impairments.

of the dominant understanding of disability, to bring disabled people and employment 'together'.

1.2.7 *Discrimination*

This section has so far considered the many sides to the employment position and experience of disabled people, but little has been said about *why* disabled people are in a disadvantaged position. There is, clearly, no straightforward answer, but this sub-section will argue that the situation is the result of a series of complex processes - of individual and social negotiation, and construction of the disability and employment relationship - underpinned by relations of power, including *discrimination*. By discrimination is meant a different decision or experience occurring which, if all other factors are the same, can be attributed to a characteristic of the person. The crucial issue here is that such opinions are produced and re-produced as real employment experiences for disabled people. So, for example, two people have identical skills, qualifications, age, gender, even names and social backgrounds, but one has an impairment and the other does not. This single feature of difference can often mean that one person has an advantage - for example, gains employment - and the other is disadvantaged - for example, is unemployed or in 'poor work'. Above, Berthoud *et al* (1993) claimed that disability has a direct impact on the employment experience: "detailed analysis of the combined OPCS disability survey and the Family Expenditure Survey clearly establishes that the apparent differences in employment rates ... are directly associated with disability ... not indirect effects of age, family structure and so on" (p.23). So where does this difference, this discrimination, take place in employment? 'Within' the disabled person, with employers, or with PAC Teams and other support organisations? I would argue that it takes place at all three (and more) of these locations, together producing the different employment experiences of disabled people. Each location illustrates different forms of discrimination and it is important to explore each one.

Bynoe *et al* (1991) argue that there are four types of discrimination in relation to disability: *direct*, where the disability is simply and openly the reason for different treatment; *indirect*, where other factors - such as age or skills - are cited, but disability is

the underlying reason (this can sometimes happen unknowingly); *institutional*, through the structures of employment and support services and through the past experiences of disabled people, for example in education, a person's impairment/disability can change their employment experience; and lastly, *fair* discrimination, when an impairment is clearly a barrier to employment, the most commonly quoted example being the blind airline pilot, which (with current technology) would not be possible and so not discriminatory. I would add one more form of discrimination - all of the above are usually associated with negative outcomes, that is, a person is disadvantaged because of the discrimination, but there is also *positive* discrimination, i.e. when a person is given greater opportunity because of their, in this case, impairment/disability. Although any policy of positive discrimination remains unlawful in the UK, many companies and organisations and until recently the Government (through the employment 'Quota' - see section 1.3), operate 'positive action' programmes to encourage disabled people into employment (for example, a guaranteed interview if a disabled applicant fulfils the criteria for the job).

A report by the then 'Spastics Society' (now renamed 'Scope') in 1990 (published as Graham *et al*, 1990) presented very strong evidence that employers discriminate *directly* against disabled applicants. The research for the report involved sending two application letters to companies for advertised jobs, the only difference between the letters being that one stated clearly that the applicant was disabled, but that the impairment should - as the curriculum vitae of past experience showed - have no impact on their ability to do the job.⁸ Of the 94 valid replies, 51 employers expressed a positive interest in both applicants, 37 employers were only interested in the able-bodied candidate and rejected the disabled candidate - an indicator of discrimination, and 6 employers were only interested in the disabled applicant - possible *positive*

⁸ The added sentence in one of the paired letters was as follows: "I should explain that I am a person with cerebral palsy and am registered disabled. However, as I think my education and work history show, my disability has not restricted my working life".

Notes: (i) The researchers made fictional applications to two different jobs, in commuting distance of London; (ii) No limitations resulting from the disability were stated and the applicant definitely did not state that they were a wheelchair user.

discrimination.⁹ Overall, the able-bodied candidate received 1.5 times more positive offers than the equally skilled and qualified disabled candidate. The report concluded that, "This shows very widespread discrimination against disabled people" (p.4).¹⁰

A selection of the employer responses to the letters illustrate the understanding of, and discrimination against, disabled people: "It is frequently necessary for all staff to travel between the subsidiary companies, using a company vehicle, attend meetings and conferences and generally be available to assist in a wide range of duties, many of which may require a degree of physical ability"; "Due to your disability I feel I should bring to your attention the fact that there are steps up to the building and in addition our offices are situated over three floors ... A lift serves the ground and subsequent floors, but not the lower ground floor which is where the successful applicant will be required to work"; "We were interested to read your CV and work record, but feel that work in this very pressurised environment with long hours and a great deal of travel and unsocial hours would not be in your interest. However we will retain your details and if anything less demanding arises we will endeavour to get in touch" (1990, p.5-6). All of the above responses are *direct* discrimination in action - assumptions are being made about the ability, or lack of it, of the disabled applicants, specifically that they have mobility problems, are unable to travel, are inflexible in their work tasks, are wheelchair users and have poor strength and stamina. While the disabled applicant *may* experience some of these things, this was *not* stated in the letter and so is the assumption of the employer. Moreover, they are powerful assumptions, as they result in a person not being considered for a job that they are capable of. As argued in the Introduction, social constructions of, in this case, what disabled people are capable of, are very real in their production or materialisation. In all three cases cited the able-bodied applicant received a positive response, either being offered an interview or promised further contact.

⁹ There were 197 application letters sent, of the 147 replies, 94 were 'valid'. A valid result was defined as a 'positive' response (this could include an application form, an interview, or a request for a 'phone conversation').

¹⁰ There had been very little change in attitudes and experiences since 1986, when a similar piece of research was done by the Spastics Society (Fry, 1986).

The employers in the Spastics Society report also operated *indirect* discrimination, where, although the disability is not named in the rejection, it is clearly the reason for the unsuccessful application. For example, in one case the disabled applicant received the reply, "As you know, we asked for at least one year's suitable experience; we feel that you are therefore over-experienced for this post, which is very much an assistant to the managing Director's PA", which also, paradoxically, described her typing speed as "inadequate", while the able-bodied candidate with the same work experience was offered an interview. Another disabled applicant was rejected because they did not, "quite match the job profile", while again the able-bodied applicant was invited for interview. The methodology of the research (the matched applications) allows us to conclude that although other factors - such as experience and suitability - were given as reasons for rejection, it was the applicant's disability that was the issue. The same report claims that this indirect discrimination shows that employers often have different criteria for judging disabled people's applications. This is evident even in a positive response, as one employer wrote in reply, "Your disability will not jeopardise your chances - if you are the best candidate, you are the best candidate. This office is on the first floor, up one flight of stairs, and the job requires some messaging [*sic*] to other companies in the business square. I hope that this will not be a problem. I look forward to meeting you" (1990, p.6). I am not arguing that impairment has no impact on employment capabilities - it can have and does - but the effects are massively wide-ranging and decisions should be based not on assumptions, but on facts, and the person who knows the facts best is the disabled person, not the employer. The best moment for this to be assessed is at interview, or even better in a follow-up discussion, not in response to an application letter. It continues to be the case that employers feel they are taking a risk in employing, or even interviewing a disabled person, and so attempt to avoid it, choosing what they feel is the 'safe' option, the able-bodied person. And rejection at the application stage also implies that the Spastics Society report reveals only the 'tip of the iceberg' of employment discrimination, "If employers are discriminating at the first stage of recruitment then it is likely that disabled people experience discrimination throughout their career in terms of work assignments, pay levels and

promotion” (1990, p.5; this is clear in the disadvantaged position of disabled in terms of occupations and earnings - see above).

The personal *attitudes* and actions of employers are crucial to the operation of direct and indirect discrimination in employment in relation to disabled people. The Spastics Society study (1990) showed that small and medium-sized firms were the most likely to discriminate against disabled people, but apparently paradoxically, the most likely to be positive about a disabled applicant. The presence of a single personnel officer or small team who make the decisions on recruitment can be compared to large companies, which are more likely to have a standardised selection procedure, run by a larger team of personnel staff, so personal discretion plays less of a role here. This is part of a powerful *individualisation* of disability - the experience and relations of disability involving, and being the responsibility of, the person with impairment - which is right at the heart of the dominant understanding of disability and employment.

An analysis of the attitudes and practices of employers in relation to disability (Morrell, 1990) found that the major reason given by employers for not employing disabled people was the ‘lack of disabled applicants’, and on the other side (possibly part of the explanation for this) the employers considered that they did not have job types suitable for disabled people, particularly in terms of what the employers considered to be ‘vital’ abilities to do the job. Yet many of these ‘vital’ abilities could not stand up to objective analysis. And, further, employers thought that their premises were ‘unsuitable for people with disabilities’. Morrell explained these attitudes and assumptions as follows: “There was substantial goodwill towards employing people with disabilities. In practice this was tempered by the perception that employing people with disabilities may present the employer with problems - both within the organisation and for recruitment” (p.23).¹¹ The three ‘reasons’ for not employing disabled people, set out above, display both *direct* discrimination (premises not suitable for disabled people) and *indirect*

¹¹ Morrell report (1990) key findings: of the 1,160 public and private employers surveyed, only 75 per cent said they would not discriminate against disabled people; 13 per cent said they would only take on disabled workers for certain types of jobs; 6 per cent said they would not employ disabled people ‘under any circumstances’; only 4 per cent said they would positively encourage applications from disabled people.

discrimination (unsuitable job types), and also the third type of discrimination (as set out by Bynoe *et al*, 1991), *institutional* discrimination (evident in the first reason, 'a lack of disabled applicants').

While direct and indirect discrimination against disabled people are highly damaging to disabled people's opportunities of gaining satisfactory employment, institutional discrimination is a more pervasive and long-term force. Institutional discrimination means that discriminatory attitudes and actions are, or have been, 'built into' the structures and practices of employers and, also significantly, into the benefits system and Government policy. Discrimination of this kind is the hardest to identify and the most problematic to confront and change. The 'lack of disabled applicants' implies institutional discrimination for several reasons: firstly, it may reveal that the company has a bad image as a discriminatory employer or is unlikely to offer good opportunities and/or flexible working arrangements and it may have a recruitment process that discourages disabled applicants.¹² Secondly, the inflexibility of the welfare benefits system does not allow/encourage disabled people to apply for any job, as, if successful, a *reduction* in income is possible because the loss of benefits is not compensated for by the job earnings. Thirdly, it may reveal the lack of suitable experience and educational qualifications of many disabled people, because of an often poorer experience of education and training. And fourthly, the poor accessibility and reliability of the transport system. The latter three reasons are particularly relevant as they cannot be linked directly to employment, and even despite the recent anti-discrimination legislation (the DDA (1995) - see section 1.3), still significantly affect disabled people. Disability rights campaigners have indeed argued that having rights in employment are not of much use if

¹² Recruitment processes for companies include a whole range of tests and evaluations, which can potentially be discriminatory to disabled people: a medical questionnaire and examination can ask questions about individual health matters that have nothing to do with the requirements of the job; there is the future possibility of genetic screening of applicants, with the possible result that companies will not take on individuals who have the potential for future disability; some companies use physical and mental tests, such as 'survival' techniques, and 'psychometric questionnaires', which are not a fair test for everyone; appearance is often crucial in the recruitment process, and those who are 'visually unacceptable', particularly for jobs serving the public, are often excluded (Barnes, 1991; The Guardian, 1997b).

a disabled person cannot get to work, or cannot compete for a job because of a poor education, or will lose so much benefit that it will not be worthwhile.

Barnes (1991) argues that the welfare system is a major factor in the discrimination process. The higher costs of living that many disabled people face, such as extra heating, special foods, medication and transport, do not diminish when a disabled person enters employment. Because of the welfare system structure, what *does* diminish is the state financial support which pays for many of these extra items. So, for many disabled people employment income has to more than cover these costs for it to be worthwhile. Barnes argues that, "The combination of disproportionately low wages and the added costs of disability forces a great many disabled people out of the labour market altogether" (1991, p.76).

Despite recent moves towards educational integration (The Guardian, 1997c) many disabled children, who are the employed and unemployed adults of today, had a poor experience of education either in a separate 'special school' or in a 'remedial' section of a mainstream school. This education has often not provided them with the confidence, skills, or qualifications necessary to gain satisfactory and well paid employment (Barnes, 1991; Walker, 1982). Most employers now use sophisticated application procedures, including aptitude tests and interviews, which are dependent on particular skills learnt in education. 'Paper' qualifications have also become increasingly important for employers, and the SCPR research (Prescott-Clarke, 1990) showed that disabled people with qualifications were much more likely to get employment than those without (a greater difference than between non-disabled people with and without qualifications). So, for disabled people without the 'appropriate' educational qualifications for the job they want, the choice is stark: unemployment or a job of lower occupational status and consequently lower earnings (the SCPR analysis showed that the proportion of disabled employees with no qualifications is higher than for non-disabled employees). Enough and appropriate experience for a job is also highly important, even 'vital', for employers. Workers who can show an ability to adjust to a new job with the minimum of training and time are far more attractive to employers than those who do not (Barnes, 1991). Such expectations are particularly evident in some of the practices of

'flexible' employment (see Chapter Five). As has been shown above, disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to be unemployed for long periods, a situation that will cause a loss of work 'readiness' and which is viewed unfavourably by most employers. For many disabled people born with an impairment there is a complete lack of work experience and job opportunities are rare (Barnes, 1991; Walker, 1982). Disabled people in this position have great difficulties - their options include some form of rehabilitation training with a voluntary organisation, assessment advice and support from a PAC Team, or a place in sheltered or supported employment. While all may give some form of training and 'experience', there is plenty of evidence that this does not lead to employment (for example, in 1989/90 about half of the 25,000 people for whom Disability Resettlement Service (now PAC Teams) provided assessments and guidance, did not move into employment, but into further rehabilitation; Department of Employment, 1990).

Lastly, transport: the SCPR study (1990) found that 38 per cent of disabled employees found travelling to work extremely time-consuming and tiring, and 9 per cent said that they had to pay more than non-disabled people to travel to and from work. The public transport system, as Barnes (1991) argues, is not designed for disabled people - it is physically inaccessible, inadequately staffed and there is a lack of clear information. And many employers now require workers to be able to drive a car, and sometimes use it as a criterion for the acceptance or rejection of applications. Large numbers of disabled people are not able to acquire these skills either because of the nature of their impairment or because they do not have the finances to learn (and to gain access to an adapted car, if necessary).

1.2.8 Summary and voices

The employment position of disabled people is at the same time very clear and highly complex. Disabled people are significantly disadvantaged in employment, as the above discussion has shown, but it is not always easy to see why. There are many processes, chiefly direct discrimination and the more insidious institutional discrimination, that keep disabled people on the fringes of employment. At the same

time, it is difficult to keep constant an idea of what 'disability' is and who is included in the definition. Importantly, the chapter so far has argued that the position and experience of disabled people in employment is a process, indeed a complex set of processes, that involve the interaction of social and personal practices being 'worked out' in the context of strong relations of power around what disability means and how it is understood, including forces of discrimination.

This final sub-section will try to 'pick a path' through this complex situation by listening to the voices of some of those who are at the centre of the debate - disabled people themselves. The Spastics Society report (1990) included interviews with disabled men and women who were either in employment or had tried to get a job. For example, Marie Cruz was 25 years old in 1990. She left school with 6 'O' levels, but had to give up 'A' levels after a year because of illness related to her polio. She wants to be a psychologist, but because of not completing her 'A' levels she has trained on YTS and become a secretary. In the job, her supervisor, "made remarks that made me feel uncomfortable. ... Speed is of the essence and as I need a little more time to carry things out, I've found it difficult and I have been to my supervisor saying there are alternative ways to achieving tasks but she told me that 'this is your job and you have to do it'". Marie felt that her supervisor, "thought I should be perfect in my work, not an attitude she has towards other people. I thought she was being totally unfair and singling me out". In summary, Marie said, "I don't know if other people's attitudes towards disability will ever change. I just hope able-bodied people will realise that we disabled like anyone else have dreams. What is really restricting me is the fact that people look at my disability as something difficult to cope with in the workplace. I believe I have the potential to be of service to other people if they only allow me. I too can advise and help people at work just as my colleagues do, but they treat me as if I'm ignorant. I'm always willing to help, disabled people are just as capable as any of them" (p.9).

There is a strong sense here of the attitudes and understanding of disability excluding people from employment, or, if in employment, having different expectations. Below is another case,

William Stevens, a graduate of Economics and Accountancy, had to make over 150 applications before being asked for an interview (his colleagues from university had to make on average 10 applications). He was successful at the interview and, "I stayed in this first job for about four or five years and in terms of doing the job I was treated quite fairly. However there was one problem and that was salary. All the way through my training I was receiving about 20 per cent

lower than trainees who had gone through in the same time” (p.9). When he qualified with the firm they continued in their discrimination offering him a salary, “considerably lower than other people who had qualified and this time it wasn’t just a matter of 20 per cent. I was very indignant, you make all the effort and take all the exams and then most people when they qualify have about a third increase in salary if not double so it’s somewhat hard when you get a rise which is a bit like a kick in the face”. He resigned his post and has now set up his own business (p.9).

A final few voices capture the complexity of the employment experience: “I’m very dispirited about employment - how long do you go on trying before you call it a day?” (Caroline Brenton, p.10); “There is no doubt in my mind that prospective employers don’t want anyone in a wheelchair” (Ben Rogers, p.10); “Because I am working I can make decisions that other disabled people just can’t make, like where and how I am going to live and what I am going to do with my day” (unnamed man, p.10). And Brian Crawford, “Because I’m disabled I don’t even get a second look when applying for a job, so there is no way that I can get out from under the poverty line. I’m disabled and I live in a society that doesn’t recognise the disabled. I can work. I should have that opportunity” (p.1).

Disability and employment are in a complex relationship, which can be described as a *process*. This is a useful way of understanding this relationship because it recognises the dynamics of both disability and employment, both changeable in meaning and in effect. The position of disabled people in employment is always changing, always becoming, never finished. However, this is not a open, free relationship between disability and employment, but one that operates and materialises in the context of a network of power relations, involving discrimination, the policies of companies and Government and the overall understanding of disability and employment as mutually antagonistic. One particularly important part of this network of power is Government policy and legislation, which is the subject of the next section.

1.3 Legislation and policy approaches

The UK Government has a desire to give disabled people the opportunity to work. The new Labour Government’s ‘Welfare to Work’ proposals and the ‘New Deal’ for

single parents and disabled people are the latest manifestation of this approach (The Guardian, 1997d). Through a combination of employment advice and skills training and restructuring and possibly reducing disability benefits, the Government aims to get disabled people back into employment and as a consequence reduce the benefits bill. There is a social philosophy underpinning this (articulated in particular by the then Social Security Minister Frank Field in 1997), which sees *work* as the only true way for people to escape poverty and so be *independent*. Work is a 'good thing' and everyone should enjoy its benefits. This thinking has driven the policies of Governments since the Second World War, most notably with the 'Quota' scheme, the policies of persuasion and the recent DDA.

1.3.1 *The 'Quota'*

The 1944 Disabled Persons (Employment) Act, a response to the returning injured servicemen, established the employment 'Quota'. Under the Quota all companies and organisations with over 20 employees had to have a minimum of 3 per cent 'Registered Disabled' people as employees.¹³ Registered disabled people were advised by specialist support services, known as 'Disability Resettlement Officers', or DROs, who assessed their capabilities and attempted to find them employment. The Quota scheme was based on the premise that companies would feel a moral responsibility to employ disabled people after the war, as so many working men had been impaired during the conflict. However, this was insufficient and as the war years grew more distant the Quota was increasingly ignored. Basing its success so firmly on goodwill and with an almost non-existent enforcement policy (there have been only 10 prosecutions between 1944 and 1991 and many companies and organisations have gained exemptions), the Quota has slipped into dormancy. Successive Government reports and documents on disability and employment have noted that, although the Quota clearly does not work, there is no strong

¹³ The 'Register of Disabled People', set up as part of the 1944 Act, established a list of workers who were 'occupationally handicapped'. The Register was divided into two parts - those who were capable of 'normal' or 'open' employment, and those who could only work in 'sheltered' or 'supported' employment (Gooding, 1996).

argument for abolishing it, as it still puts down a 'marker' for companies with regard to the employment of disabled people (Department of Employment, 1990).

The other main part of the 1944 Act was the scheme known as 'Designated Employment'. This scheme defined two jobs - electric lift operator and car park attendant - as *not* part of the 3 per cent included in the company's Quota. So, in a sense, these two job types, both low skill and solitary, were designated as jobs for disabled people. The Quota and Designated Employment were both finally abolished with the introduction of the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act.

The Quota had at its heart a strong desire to get disabled people into employment, to the extent that it was intent on enforcing the practice. There was clearly an understanding that without such measures employers would not employ disabled people. However, there was a gradual change of opinion as the Government decided that enforcing such a law was both impossible and went against the principles of economic decision-making. There was a shift to individual responsibility for employment for disabled people, as explained in the following sub-section.

1.3.2 'Persuasion', packaging and access

Between the 1944 and 1995 Acts mentioned above, the successive Governments' approaches have been a largely ineffective combination of encouragement, training and the 'packaging' of disabled people for employment, and the encouragement or persuasion of employers to take on more disabled people, with a business cum moral argument. The key document in this period was the 'Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People' and an accompanying video, 'Fit for Work', both launched in 1984. The Code was intended for senior and personnel managers in companies and organisations and set out to "recommend specific policy objectives about employing people with disabilities and how to achieve them and provide a brief reminder of legal obligations" (1984, p.5). It recommended that it was in an organisation's best interests to have a comprehensive and effective equal opportunities policy in relation to disability, if only to be "recognised by the community as a company which provides good employment opportunities to people with disabilities" (p.6). It explained - to managers - that the main

reason for the 'unfavourable' employment position for disabled people was that "amidst competing demand on time and resources, managers may overlook or underestimate the potential of employees with disabilities", and the Code was therefore designed to, "enable companies to examine their objectives towards people with disabilities so that they can benefit fully from proven skills, abilities and commitment" (p.5). So, employers were encouraged to think of disabled people as having a range of skills, but, fundamentally, being outside the 'traditional' workforce, and not employees in the 'true' sense.

The Code was 'enhanced' in 1990 with the introduction of the 'Positive About Disabled People' slogan and 'two ticks' symbol. Companies that signed up to the Code and which committed themselves to do such things as 'interview all applicants with a disability who meet the minimum criteria for the job' and 'made every effort to retain employees who became disabled', were permitted to use the slogan and symbol on job advertisements, letterheads, in company magazines and so on.

Several attempts have been made by successive Governments to 'make it easier' for disabled people and employers to 'come together' in employment. On the first issue there are benefit schemes, particularly 'Disability Working Allowance' (DWA, introduced in 1992) and on the second issue there is 'Access to Work' (ATW). DWA is designed to support a disabled person's income from potentially fewer hours in work than an able-bodied person, in an attempt to get over the too often stark choice between benefits *or* work, with the former often being the only reliable source of income (so that a disabled person will be better off in work than on benefits).¹⁴ An analysis of the DWA in 1994, however, found that only one sixth of people eligible for the benefit were claiming it and that it was disabled people already in employment who were claiming, not those who were out of work (Policy Studies Institute, 1994). Access to Work provides equipment or expertise to enable a disabled person to do a job effectively, with the aim of reducing the financial 'burden' that is assumed to be placed on employers when they take on a disabled person. For a Government scheme it has been extremely successful and, almost uniquely so in recent disability history, it has been supported by both companies

¹⁴ DWA is only available to those disabled people already in work and in receipt of a disability benefit, and whose disability limits their earning capacity.

and disability organisations. Its success is probably down to two things: firstly, its intention to make disabled people as employable as able-bodied people by 'levelling out' the differences through the use of equipment or specialised services (such as sign language interpreters). Secondly, it manages to balance the two schools of thought, dependence and independence, by blending the demands of the employee (for the equal chance to do the job) and the employer (for covering the costs involved in employing that person). Access to Work is particularly interesting as neither business nor disability organisations *should* really support it, for it both distorts the labour market for the former and, for the latter, treats disabled people as more difficult to employ rather than as equal. There is perhaps here a consensus that for some disabled people at least some support in employment is essential. In 1995 the funding for Access to Work was reduced, and its whole future was put in doubt. Some even suspected that it would be run down once the Disability Discrimination Act was in place. But, as it turned out, this was just a blip and the scheme continues to operate effectively.

Disability Working Allowance and Access to Work are very significant because they both recognise that for some disabled people, support, be it financial or material, is essential if they are going to be able to work. Additionally, ATW can be seen as a significantly different way of understanding disability, one that focuses on the environment - the workplace, the equipment and the personal support - and not just the individual. This shift beyond the individual into altering the social context can be seen as the 'social model of disability' (as explained in the Introduction) in action. This is significant because the overall Government approach is strongly based on the individual understanding of disability.

1.3.3 The Disability Discrimination Act

The introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) on December 2nd 1995, with the employment section becoming law a year later, has transformed the debate around disability and employment.¹⁵ It is now illegal to discriminate against disabled people in employment and in recruitment to employment; disability is now recognised

¹⁵ The DDA has four main sections, covering employment, goods and services, education and transport.

both as an issue of discrimination and as a social and personal identity. The possible impact of the DDA is a matter of intense debate. The Conservative Government which introduced the Bill claimed that it was the beginning of the end of discrimination against disabled people. Disability campaigning groups state that it does not go far enough and what is needed is full civil rights legislation for disabled people, some even claiming that the DDA is a 'bigot's charter' (Gooding, 1996). Some business leaders claim that the Act will impose restrictions on their ability to employ staff and to sell goods and services in the most cost effective way. Overall, however, the DDA puts disability firmly on the equal opportunities agenda. Before the Act it was completely lawful to discriminate against disabled people in employment, that is, to not employ or to dismiss, a person solely because they were disabled. The DDA has, if not ended this discrimination, provided an opportunity for disabled people to claim their right to a chance in employment.

The DDA is the result of a political compromise. The anti-regulation Conservative Government introduced it to head off a Private Member's Bill calling for civil rights legislation for disabled people, which had gained cross-party support. Harry Barnes MP's 'Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill' 1994 was the seventeenth attempt to introduce anti-discrimination legislation since Jack Ashley MP's first bill in 1982. Vigorous campaigning over the intervening years by a broad range of disability organisations, co-ordinated by the 'Rights Now!' coalition, eventually put the Government under so much pressure it had to respond. The Government's Disability Discrimination Bill was introduced in 1994 and speedily became law; some have claimed that this haste resulted in an Act with fundamental weaknesses.

The weaknesses of the DDA are already becoming clear in the first Industrial Tribunal cases brought by disabled people (TUC, 1997). Many of the judgements have found in favour of the employer because the person was found 'not to be disabled', because the discrimination was 'justified' (see below), or because the employer had made all 'reasonable adjustments'. The Act defines a disabled person as, 'a person who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse affect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities' (DDA, 1995, p.1). Many people who

consider themselves to be disabled do not 'fit in' to this definition and so are not protected by the Act. An employer breaks the new law if they give a disabled person 'less favourable' treatment than an able-bodied person, or if they fail to provide 'reasonable adjustments' to the work environment or organisation to make it possible for the disabled person to work. The Industrial Tribunals have decided in many cases that the employer is 'justified' in not employing the disabled person, as they have 'good reason' to exclude the person. These 'good reasons' have often been related to the employer showing that they have made significant attempts, through 'reasonable adjustments', to employ or retain the disabled person. 'Reasonable adjustments' can include making adjustments to premises, reorganising work duties, altering work hours, modifying equipment or providing a reader or interpreter (DDA, 1995, section 6(3)). An employer can exclude a disabled person if it is shown that the adjustments required are 'not reasonable', which usually means they would make little difference in reducing disadvantage, they would cause other problems for the employer, or that they would cost too much. All these decisions are made by Industrial Tribunals.¹⁶

The Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Race Relations Act (1976) are much clearer. They make illegal all forms of discrimination against all people. Proving that you are a man or a woman, or black or white, does not (usually) come up in the court cases that involve these Acts (although there have been some cases of transsexuals having to 'prove' their gender status in the European Court; The Guardian, 1996a). Importantly, there is no concept of 'justified' discrimination or 'reasonable adjustment', as discrimination in employment is simply illegal (not that this has made proving discrimination an easy process). Crucially, the two Acts also include indirect discrimination in their remit. In other words, they cover not just direct discrimination such as hostile attitudes or stereotyping, but also conditions or requirements that are seemingly neutral but have an adverse effect on a particular ethnic group or gender. No such legislation is included in the DDA, which, as has been shown above, allows direct discrimination if it can be 'justified'. The other area where the DDA is weak in

¹⁶ The DDA only covers employers with more than 20 employees. Small firms are the vast majority of companies in the UK.

comparison to the sex and race discrimination legislation is in the area of enforcement. While the sex and race discrimination Acts have strong bodies (the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, respectively) to back them up and support people through the courts, the DDA and disabled people have no such support (the new Labour Government has, however, promised the establishment of such an organisation).

The new law has yet to be fully assessed, as it has only been in operation for a year, but there is evidence that it is already having an impact. Many of the larger companies are making a very conscious effort to attract and retain disabled employees. Indeed, some companies have seen it as an opportunity to display their credentials as an equal opportunities employer. The legal consequences have forced organisations and companies to think more clearly about disability and employment, and to monitor their recruitment procedures and to get a clearer idea of who their disabled employees *are*. It has also made disabled people more visible in employment. Employers and organisations are now highly sensitive to their disabled employees and to the issues of disability and employment. Whether this sensitivity is more to do with fear of prosecution and public image and less to do with equality for disabled people in employment, it is too soon to say. The introduction of the DDA is nonetheless still a most significant moment, particularly as it was brought in by a Conservative Government that in 1990 refused to accept that discrimination against disabled people even existed.

The DDA has recognised that there is a disabled identity in relation to employment, but significantly this identity has to be 'proved' through a series of tests, or even a court case. Here, the meaning of disability is based on an individual medical understanding. The clauses in the Act on 'adjustments' do include a notion of the social understanding of disability, but the term 'reasonable' in terms of these adjustments and that some discrimination may be 'justified' does go against this position. I would like to argue that although the 'reasonable adjustment' clause has caused strong reaction in the disabled political community, it is perhaps a recognition of the complexity of the disability-employment relationship, in that it acknowledges that some disabled people do need support in gaining employment and that employment is not possible for all. Also,

some of the 'adjustments' encourage the use of flexible working arrangements - flexible working is seen as one way of 'making the connection' between disability and employment (see Chapter Five).

1.4 Disability and employment: theoretical understandings

It is important now to 'stand back' from the evidence and consider how the disability-employment relationship is understood and represented. From the above discussion there are clear themes in the relationship between disability and employment: the individualisation of disability, the mutual 'impossibility' of disability and employment, the importance of the flexible working practices in the discussion around employment and disability, and the support that some disabled people require to be in employment. Central to all of these themes is the conceptualisation of disability and employment as *process*, the continual production, negotiation and re-production of the meaning and the employment position and experience of disabled people.

In the sub-sections below three theoretical understandings of the disability-employment relationship attempt to explain the position and experience of disabled people in employment. However, it is important to state that the three understandings are not of equal standing. The first one, named 'Disabled people should work', is dominant in the discussion around disability and employment - Government policy, employer attitudes, and public knowledge all support the individual conceptualisation of disability. Only recently has the second understanding begun to challenge this dominance, and still only on the margins. The 'embodied' understanding is as yet unrecognised in the debate. One aim of this research is for this theory to gain a place in the discussion around disability and employment.

1.4.1 *'Disabled people should work'*

The policy-making of the Government (see 1.3) and the Government-sponsored surveys (as used in 1.2) are important as they have a strong influence on the way disabled people are understood and 'dealt with' by Government agencies, companies, the media and public opinion. There is a clear assumption in Government policy and research that

work is a 'good thing', socially, psychologically and financially for the disabled person, their families and for society more broadly. Work is the 'ideal' position for all people and disabled people should be encouraged, as far as is possible, to take up and enjoy its benefits. The barriers to disabled people entering employment are identified in this understanding as lack of job knowledge and work skills, combined with the ignorance and possible discrimination of employers. The task of Government and society is to encourage both disabled people and employers to move closer together on the issue of employment, by making disabled people more 'employable' and employers more 'receptive'.

This understanding explains the discrimination experienced by disabled people as direct and indirect. It is the attitudes and prejudices of employers (and the public more generally) and the employment practices that result, that are the main barrier to employment opportunities for disabled people. If employers can be educated to see that disabled people are just as good as able-bodied employees, then most of the problems for disabled people in employment will disappear.

In this understanding no account is taken of institutional discrimination, that is, the structural and environmental barriers to disabled people's participation in employment. This exposes its fundamental, underlying philosophy: that disabled people's employment experiences are a 'direct' relationship between the disabled person and the employer. The reasons for the lack of involvement in employment and the policies that are proposed to remedy this, are based on the premise that the disabled person is an individual and the barriers to their employment are centred in them and in their relation to employers. According to this understanding, disability and employment is an *individual* matter, not an issue for society to accept responsibility for and tackle.

1.4.2 An alternative understanding: capitalism and disability

The second section of this chapter argued that *institutional* discrimination against disabled people in employment is deeply-rooted. This argument has been taken even further, with the proposition that the whole Western capitalist economic system is fundamentally discriminatory to disabled people and any progress that disabled people

make is *in spite of* the conditions. Finkelstein, in a now classic paper (1981a), considers the historical relationship between disabled people and their 'helpers' or carers; the argument can be extended to talk about employment. Using a materialist framework, Finkelstein argues that there are three 'phases' in the development of British capitalism and the related position of disabled people. 'Phase 1' is prior to the industrial revolution, when production was limited to agriculture, in a society of small communities. Finkelstein argues that those impaired people who survived birth would have lived as part of the community and the agricultural and craft work could be easily adapted for most disabled people.

The industrial revolution is 'Phase 2' of Finkelstein's sequence. Inventions and power enlarged and speeded up the craft work machines, increasingly housed in large factories and standardised in operation, to be used by any employee. All these developments, the argument goes, began to exclude disabled people from employment. Oliver (1990) quotes Ryan and Thomas (1980, p.101): "The speed of factory work, the enforced discipline, the time-keeping and the production norms - all these were a highly unfavourable change from the slower, more self-determined and flexible methods of work into which many handicapped people had been integrated [in Phase 1]" (quoted in Oliver, 1990, p.27). And Morris makes the overall argument that, "The operation of the labour market in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries effectively depressed handicapped people of all kinds to the bottom of the market" (1969, p.9). The above discussion could imply that flexible working methods, such as those used prior to the industrial revolution, are suited to disabled people and allow greater involvement in employment. Could this be the case now? The crucial issue is, I argue, the *form* of flexibility in evidence in the 1990s. Before the industrial revolution flexibility was inherent in the system of production, while now, although there are increasingly flexible working practices, it is largely organised in a very rigid way, without the looseness that made pre-industrial employment possible for many disabled people.

Finkelstein continues his argument by saying that because of the increasing unemployment of disabled people the state became concerned and involved, setting up the first of the institutions to house disabled people (and other groups such as beggars and

prostitutes). There was another pressure to identify disabled people and separate them: the state needed to know who was really not able to work and who was able-bodied and avoiding work. Disabled people were increasingly allocated to the former category (whether they were capable of work or not) and seen as 'unemployable'. Finkelstein's 'Phase 3' is not so well detailed, but argues that Western society is entering a post-industrial phase in which disability will be seen solely as a social restriction, and will therefore be tackled more effectively.

Oliver (1990) comments that while Finkelstein's model is oversimplistic (and overoptimistic) it does "highlight the importance of the mode of production in significantly influencing perceptions and experiences of disability" (p.29). Stone (1985) argues that the concepts of 'disability' and 'disabled people' were a key part of the development of capitalism, in that they allowed a separation between those who 'worked' and 'those in need'. Disability became an "important boundary category through which people are allocated either to the work-based or the needs-based system of distribution" (Stone, quoted in Oliver, 1990, p.40). Stone argues that it still has relevance, "The disability concept was essential to the development of a workforce in early capitalism and remains indispensable as an instrument of the state in controlling the labour supply" (1985, p.179). Finkelstein broadens this to the whole of society when he argues that, "the successful disabled integrators have found that society, uncontaminated by their presence for centuries, has designed a world which does not recognise their existence" (1981a, p.63). What Finkelstein is saying is that the way that work and society are organised is for able-bodied people, or put the other way, *not* for the variety of impairments of disabled people.

It is important to emphasise once again that this is a minority understanding, which has only recently begun to challenge the dominant understanding of disability as an individual, rather than a social, matter.

1.4.3 An embodied understanding

Both of the above understandings - which can be thought of as 'individual' and 'social' theorisations respectively - conceptualise the relationship between disability and

employment as an economic and *oppositional* relationship. The two elements are understood and represented as having a difficult relationship which needs to change within the individual disabled person *or* within the organisation of work.

I want to argue that there is a possible third understanding of the disability and employment relation. The 'embodied' understanding as I name it, attempts to 'get inside' the employment experience of disabled people and see it as a complex relationship that shifts as the disability identity and the processes of employment change.

To think about disability and employment in this way requires us to turn 'upside down' the notion of the oppositional relationship which the other understandings assume. The central aspect of this third understanding is the *process* of employment of disabled people in work, that is, the complex series of practices that involve the social and personal actions and experiences of disabled people and employment. I want to argue that it is the way that social practices - the organisation of employment, the attitudes of employers, the institutional structures - materialise or become 'real' in the bodies of disabled people that is the central issue in the discussion around disability and employment. It is only when such a connection between the individual and the social is made and employment and life more generally is recognised as an 'embodied' process, that the position of disabled people in employment will be fully understood. This understanding attempts to 'people' the understanding of disability and employment. While this may not allow us to easily 'read off' policy approaches, this is just as well as much of the present policy never gets hold of the complexity of the disability employment relationship.

Why embodied? The 'individual' and 'social' understandings of the relationship between disability and employment both reflect, as this chapter has shown, the very real and often difficult situation that disabled people experience in work. Yet, each of these two approaches, by discounting the other, excludes much from the debate. The individual understanding on its own does not allow for discussion of institutional discrimination and using solely the social understanding can leave out the individual problems and desires of disabled people. The embodied understanding attempts to include the advantages of both understandings, by focusing on the 'body' of the disabled person. This may seem like a

reiteration of the individual understanding, but the 'body' I am talking about here is the 'whole body' (body and mind) and this is a body that captures or gathers social and individual experiences throughout the person's life. So, the person's body becomes the place where their identity is produced and reproduced. This is of course true for everyone, disabled and non-disabled. This approach will be returned to in detail in Chapter Four, but it is useful here to stress that the crucial element in this approach is the process of *materialisation* of the social practices in the person in employment. If we consider again one of the quotations from the disabled employees from section 1.2.8.

Marie Cruz commented that, "Speed is the essence and I need a little more time to carry things out ... [My supervisor] thought I should be perfect in my work, not an attitude she had towards other people. I thought she was being totally unfair and singling me out" (1990, p.9). This single sentence has evidence of both the individual ("I need a little more time to carry things out" and "I thought she was being unfair") and the social ("Speed is the essence") understandings (*ibid.*). But most crucially these understandings are both in the same quote and are only partially evident. What is important is that Marie Cruz's employment experience is a highly complex one (as are all employment experiences) that demands an analysis that involves a combined approach of the individual and social aspects of the issue and that places the embodied experience at the centre of the analysis.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the relationship between disability and employment is at the same time deceptively clear and yet highly complicated. The disadvantaged position of disabled people in employment is undisputed, but the processes by which this situation is produced are far from clear. The definition of 'disability' is disputed and changes over time, the reasons disabled people are out of work are contested between direct and institutional discrimination and there is no clear consensus about what 'should be done'.

The chapter explained this apparently paradoxical situation by drawing out three theoretical understandings of the way that the disability-employment relation is

conceptualised. The first two understandings - referred to as individual and social - show that the issue is highly contested and will never be easy to pin down. The third proposed understanding - termed embodied - possibly offers a way of 'pinning down' the discussion, but not in a conventional sense of making it 'clear'. Rather in the sense of creating a 'space' where the disability-employment relation can be discussed in ways that are both enlightening, and empowering of disabled people.

The 'individual' and 'social' understandings of disability and employment are reflected in the 'medical' and 'social' 'models' of disability. The 'medical model', emphasising the individual, remains the dominant understanding of disability, only recently challenged by disability campaigners and academics proposing a 'social model'. This will be discussed in Chapter Three, and the alternative understanding focusing on the 'body' will be described in Chapter Four.

The three central 'issues' in the research - disability, body and employment - each has a dedicated chapter. First, however, it is important to consider the historical context. In the following chapter I argue that the 'defining moments' of the disability-employment debate were the two World Wars. The two Wars created the social, cultural and political debate around disability and employment, which unreflexively had a strong focus on the body.

Chapter Two ‘Defining moments’: the two World Wars and disability, the ‘body’ and employment

2.1 Introduction

In its discussion of the relationship between disability and employment, the previous chapter focused on developments *after* the Second World War. It did so for a very good reason: after 1945 the Government attitude and action in relation to disabled people was transformed. Government programmes were launched, as part of the new welfare state, to assist disabled people in employment, in housing and in overall well-being. The quality and availability of health care and the system of benefits for disabled people improved immeasurably. It can even be argued that the very notions of ‘disability’ and ‘disabled people’ only really came into existence after the Second World War. Before the conflict and the creation of the welfare state disabled people were not a defined ‘group’, but rather part of (mostly) the mass of the poor. A welfare state, to operate effectively, required a system of categorisation of people into different ‘need’ groups and ‘the disabled’ became one of these groups.

This chapter argues that the first half of the 20th century, between 1900 and 1950, was crucial to the development of the relationship between disability and employment and how it is understood. In particular, the two World Wars played a significant role - were indeed ‘defining moments’ - in the contemporary and present understanding of disability and employment.

The chapter is structured in the following way: firstly, the development of the relationship between disability and employment in the period 1900-1950 is discussed. In the subsequent three sections, the central themes of the research - disability, the ‘body’ and employment - are discussed in relation to the Wars. The argument is that the conceptualisation of these three elements was significantly changed by the processes of war and the social, economic and political context of the period.

2.2 ‘Defining moments’: the two World Wars and the development of British society

This section will consider the social, economic and political processes that dominated Britain during the first half of the 20th century. This is a daunting task, so the section will focus on *three* themes, with the two Wars as the ‘threads’ running through the discussion. The themes are: the increasing role of the state, the development of welfare provision and the position of women. These major changes in British society, as we shall see, had great significance for the position of disabled people in employment, both during the 1900-50 period and in the longer term.

2.2.1 *The increasing role of Government and disability*

Over the period 1900 to 1950, the state became more involved in every part of people’s lives. This had two central consequences for disabled people and employment: firstly, the Government gradually acquired a responsibility for both the position of disabled people and the employment situation and, secondly, there was an expectation that action would be taken by Government to increase the opportunities for disabled people in employment.

At the beginning of the century Britain was a country still deeply entrenched in the liberal politics and philosophy of the Victorian era. There remained a dependence on the widespread Empire, an associated dominance in trade (unhindered by protection) and a powerful and competitive manufacturing industry. Government considered its role as one of ‘enabler’, keeping trade as free-flowing as possible and companies free of regulation. The Government’s involvement in welfare provision was minimal, with a reliance on the locally-based, virtually independent, institutions of the Poor Law, which included provision for many disabled people. However, the pressures of foreign competition and the associated massive rise in unemployment in the early years of the century, forced the Government into pro-activism. The poor physical condition of many of the soldiers involved in the Boer War (1898-1901) was also seen as an issue for the Government to tackle. The connection, even if tenuous at this stage, was being made between the condition of the people and industry and the role of Government. Two

concrete examples of this came under the 'New Liberalism' of Prime Minister Lloyd George. Firstly, the new Government conceded that unemployment was not wholly due to the inefficiencies of the labour market and, secondly, the 1908 Old Age Act recognised in moral and financial terms the responsibility of Government and the country more generally, for the welfare of the people. So, the Government recognised that it had a responsibility to make provision for people who could not work and at the same time to push for a more efficient, 'healthy' workforce. While this offered some disabled people the option of employment, with the knowledge of support if it didn't work out, at the same time the pressure on labour in general to be more efficient and 'flexible' excluded many disabled people from employment. The institutions of the Poor Law were still the 'home' for many people classified as disabled.

The First World War was described by Lloyd George at its conclusion in 1918, as having left 'an imperishable mark on the conscience of the nation'. War was declared by Britain on Germany on 4th August 1914 after Germany ignored demands to withdraw from Belgium. It soon became clear that the predictions that the war would be swiftly won and the troops 'home for Christmas' were wildly inaccurate. The conflict spread across Europe and became what Marwick (1965) described as 'total war', the like of which had not been experienced before. The trench warfare, which became the hallmark of the conflict, was a military strategy with a high casualty rate; tens of thousands of men were killed and impaired. Soon Lord Kitchener's appeal of 'Your country needs you!', to attract recruits to replace those killed or injured, turned into conscription. The Government delayed this move for as long as possible, aware of its unpopularity, but by April 1916 conscription came, and as Marwick comments, it was "an event of central importance in the social history of the war" (1965, p.119). It was particularly significant, I would argue, for two reasons: firstly, it gave the Government a control over people's lives that was to be accompanied by the much broader, if less dramatic, involvement of Government in society and economy and, secondly, it involved the whole social range of men in conflict and for many this meant injury and permanent disability.

The demands of the war for ammunition pushed the Government to involve itself in industry. The Munitions of War Act was put in place to ensure industrial capacity was

used effectively for the war effort and Government control of most of the rest of industry followed. The shortage of food for the population, as import supply routes were disrupted, also saw the Government make moves to organise and take control of agricultural production. This Government control of production, with the pressure of ongoing war, expected a highly efficient labour force, with any inefficiencies to be removed. At the same time, however, the number of people not usually in such employment increased during this period. So, Government involvement in production did mean that there were more opportunities in employment, but with a pressure to ensure that these arrangements and 'temporary workers' operated effectively. Lowe (1995) has argued that the laissez-faire economics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was 'laid to rest' by the experience of the war, as Government took an increasingly 'collectivist' role in the British economy and society. It's own structure was transformed too as the number of people working for the Government increased significantly and more powers were centralised.

At the end of the war, the atmosphere in the country was one of high expectation and Britain enjoyed a short economic boom as the country celebrated peace. Despite several Government Acts in areas such as housing (the promise of 'Homes Fit For Heroes') and education, the Government largely withdrew from its collectivist position, taking notice of its commissioned Balfour Committee report which recommended a swift return to free trade and deregulation. But the boom didn't last and, as Marwick has described so vividly, it revealed the economy to be in a very weak state: "The froth was off the pint and what lay underneath was worse than anything purveyed under liquor control" (1965, p.323). Unemployment soared (culminating in the General Strike of 1926), many of the promises of reconstruction were watered down and the country was plunged into crisis, a crisis that was, arguably, to continue until the outbreak of the Second World War. The continuing recession and high unemployment of the 1930s forced the Government to consider recovering some of its control over the economy. The debate was enlivened by the publication of John Maynard Keynes' 'General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money', in 1936, which was adopted by the opposition Labour Party as part of a plan for Government organised 'national redevelopment'. It appears in

this period that a consensus developed that saw Government as central to the social and economic development of Britain. The experience of disabled people in this period was a complex one - the continuation of incarceration in one of the Poor Law workhouses for many disabled people, limited possibilities of employment for some as the post-war economy expanded. However, at the same time, the role of Government in wartime, in many important ways, did not continue afterwards. The wartime position of disabled people changed in the post-war period, with a return to traditional understandings of the position of disabled people in society, that is, as outside employment and dependent on institutional care.

The Second World War had at least the same, if not greater, an effect, than the war a generation earlier. Some argue that in fact its impact on the nation was more widespread (but not as deeply felt) than the First World War, due to the amount of bombing of civilian targets, the number of people involved and the public knowledge of the conflict.

The war certainly consolidated and expanded upon what state involvement there already was in the economy and society. In the same way as mass unemployment had done five years earlier, the war concluded the debate over state involvement. A National Government presided during the war and the state took full or partial control of most aspects of people's lives, including industry, agriculture, welfare, the media and employment. Conscription was, unlike the First World War, introduced right at the start of the conflict, and so the labour supply had to be tightly controlled. As section 2.5 will argue, the second war again opened up the opportunities for employment to those normally excluded, but crucially this was done under strict controls of labour efficiency. So, the women, older people and disabled people that were employed in production were expected to be as productive as the men lost to conscription. As a result the supposed 'opening up' of employment to all was actually quite selective. More significantly for the longer-term, Keynes seized the opportunity of the war time actions of Government to explain and promote his demand-led economic strategy. By the 1941 Budget his ideas were accepted as the only way for the Government to ensure that the economy never slipped back into the depression years of the 1920s-30s.

After the war, there were great expectations amongst the public and the returning servicemen, including those maimed and impaired, for the Government to act to repay the country's support during the conflict. As at the end of the First World War there was a lot of hope, but unlike the first war, this time the hopes were fulfilled and lasted. A flurry of legislation, based on the collectivist ideas of Keynes and Beveridge (see 2.2.2), heralded the creation of the welfare state, state education for all, the nationalisation of industry and a commitment to full employment. But by 1950, with many of the conditions of war (such as rationing) still in place, the financial consequences of the war began to emerge. Britain had debts of over £3 billion, a lack of domestic capital and a poor trade balance, which culminated in the Sterling Crisis of 1947. The post-war honeymoon of national confidence and the sense of a new beginning began to wane. However, a strong foundation had been laid in the creation of the welfare state and the involvement of Government in industry. The increased role of the state in many aspects of British life was to be a lasting effect of the two wars. Marwick concluded that these developments might well have occurred anyway, but "more slowly and more agreeably if there had been no wars", and the wars pushed them on, on a "distorted" path (1965, p.353). The increased role of Government was certainly part of the 'defining moments' of the two wars and has had a lasting effect on the position of disabled people in employment. The way in which the labour market was more tightly controlled, the closer connection made between the performance of the country (particularly in war) and the performance of the labour supply, certainly excluded many disabled people from employment, who did not fit this plan of national efficiency. However, at the same time, greater Government involvement in the economy, and society more generally and the sense of social equality that was pervasive after the second war, gave a higher profile to disabled people and their often poor social and economic position. This, combined with the significant number of men permanently injured in the wars, ensured that disability was a clear issue in 1945 (see 2.3 below).

2.2.2 The development of welfare provision and disability

Over the 1900-50 period there was the creation of a 'welfare state', a systematic provision of financial and care support for people not able to be independent in society and the economy. For disabled people this was significant in two, perhaps contradictory, ways: firstly, it provided a level of support in open society, beyond the confines of the Poor Law institutions allowing many disabled people to become part of 'mainstream' society. Secondly, and not so positively, it strengthened the process of classification of disabled people, making powerful assumptions and decisions about who was able to work (and so play a role in employment) and who was not (and so had a future in institutional care).

The provision of welfare to the poor in society was the responsibility of the local Poor Law institutions. The Poor Law of 1834 established boards of commissioners or guardians in every major city to look after the poor, those people who could not survive independently in the laissez-faire economy. The Poor Law remained the main welfare institution at the beginning of the 20th century, with some assistance from the charities formed in the Victorian period, but their coverage was by no means comprehensive geographically or socially and the service they provided - workhouses, hostels and hospitals - was little better than surviving on the streets. Those considered unable to survive in the free-market economy, and so requiring care under the Poor Law, included many physically and mentally disabled people, older people and homeless people.

The Government began to show concern for the plight of the poor in the aftermath of the Boer War, but it was more for reasons of national security and efficiency than any real compassion. It was found that many of the soldiers of the defeated British army were of poor health and fitness and this raised the issue of the health of the general population. The Government made a clear connection between the health of the nation and the health of the economy - and just as clearly a connection between the physical and mental state of a person and their employment capabilities - and was pushed into reviewing its welfare policy (or rather lack of it) with the publication, in quick succession, of three significant reports.

Rowntree's 'Poverty: a study of town life' (1903), the 1904 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration', and the 'Royal Commission on the Poor Law and Relief of Distress' (1909), all showed that the British population included a significant number of people living in extreme poverty and ill health (Butler and Jones, 1994). The 1904 Report collected 'definitive data' on the 'physical condition of the population' and recommended that there was some form of collective state response to the problem, including an 'Advisory Council' to advise 'Government on all legislative and administrative points concerning public health in respect of which state interference might be expedient'. The investigation into the Poor Law in 1909 recommended the retention of the system, but with some major revisions, including more specialised treatment for old people and children and limited financial support for those unemployed and work injured. The report stressed the national significance of this recommended action, "[There must be a] united effort to convert useless and costly inefficients into self-sustaining and respectable members of the community. No country, however rich, can permanently hold its own in the race of international competition, if hampered by an increasing load of deadweight" (p.644). There is no clear mention in these reports of disabled people, partly because, as this chapter argues, the notion of 'disability' did not appear until after the second war and partly because there was an assumption that people who could not compete in the labour market had a more appropriate place in the institutions of the Poor Law. Additionally, the desire to treat the 'work injured' sets apart those disabled by work from those disabled by disease or congenitally. The work injured were to be later joined, as what can be called 'deserving disabled', by those impaired in the war.

The two latter reports, in particular, laid down the principles in relation to poverty and welfare in the early years of this century. While the need for welfare was recognised and the limitations of the Poor Law noted, welfare was seen, like the people it was providing for, as a drain on national resources. The professed aim of the state in this period was to make people self-sustaining, so as to reduce the need for welfare payments. However, as Lloyd George recognised, not all unemployment was due to inefficiencies in the labour market and a system of National Insurance (1911), which paid a benefit to

those unemployed in certain trades (this was later widened to include all trades) was established. It was stated that not all people in society could work and so required support. However, the support was distinct for those who were not in the labour market, it was support in a non-financial form in the workhouses and hospitals.

The widening of the National Insurance Act (1911) in 1917 to cover the increasing number of men disabled by injuries sustained in the War (see 2.3), the Old Age Pension Act (1908) and the introduction of a minimum wage (for certain industries), were all evidence of an accelerating pace of social reform. Despite this, however, at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 there remained a huge gulf between the relatively few rich and the massive numbers of the poor, a gulf in income, educational opportunities and housing conditions. Public health had improved, best illustrated by the fall in the infant mortality rate, but still, in 1912, over 90 people died from starvation due to destitution (Marwick, 1965). There were divisions too between the sections of the poor, between those who had a connection into society and the economy and those who were outside and excluded from this mainstream of society, the latter including many disabled people.

As the previous sub-section showed, the Government had a greater involvement in people's lives during the War and this included the area of welfare. As well as a widening of the National Insurance cover, there was the response to the demands of the war. This included a greater concern for the diet and health of the population, particularly when conscription became necessary and with the need for greater industrial and agricultural output. The Government took a greater interest in the supply of food and the provision of primary health care. This eventually resulted in legislative action, including the 1917 Housing and Education Acts and more significantly the setting up for the first time (in 1918) of a Ministry of Health and a plan for systematic, national healthcare.

At the end of the war, amid the hopes for a new beginning, there was a legislative commitment to a new era of welfare provision, with the passing of the 1918 Education Act and the Unemployment Insurance Act (1920), which benefited all workers for the first time. However, even with the legislation in place, the Government could not withstand the pressures of business and the poor economic state of the country and with

unemployment surging upto 13.8 per cent in 1922 (from 3.1 per cent in 1920), Government promises and schemes collapsed and “reconstruction turned into retrenchment, the land fit for heroes became a wasteland” (Marwick, 1965, p.324). But, as the previous section noted, the Government retreat was reversed in the 1930s as it became clear that it was essential to readopt the collectivist ideas generated during the First War. This new collectivism included welfare and although there was little money to finance schemes of health and benefit adequately, there was a commitment made to a system of welfare and to the people of Britain. The sense of duty to the families of those who had died and the sense of guilt to those permanently injured physically and mentally, ensured that the welfare state was strongly supportive of people after the war.

During the Second World War, while the losses of people were half that of the First War, damage to property and the social and economic fabric of Britain was far greater. Schools and hospitals and people’s homes were destroyed or severely damaged. During the war, and particularly after, rebuilding became a major issue. This physical reconstruction of society and the welfare system, was accompanied by an intellectual ‘reconstruction’ of the concept of welfare, with the publication of William Beveridge’s report on ‘Social Insurance and Allied Services’ in December 1942. The Beveridge Report, as it became known, called for an attack on the ‘five giants’ of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. To do this Beveridge proposed a comprehensive welfare state, to include a National Health Service, a system of benefits for the unemployed, ill and elderly and a reformed education system (along with a commitment to full employment) (Parker, 1997). Churchill’s uneasiness about the Beveridge proposals was one of the chief reasons for his defeat at the 1945 election; the British public wanted a Welfare State and the new Labour Government delivered one. The 1946 National Insurance Act and the Education Act, 1944, were two elements of the new comprehensive welfare system. The financial constraints that became evident in the late 1940s, as mentioned in the previous sub-section, did hamper the progress of the welfare state, but its foundations were laid and it was to dominate welfare provision for the next 50 years. The construction of the welfare state had significant consequences for disabled people in employment, in that, firstly, the category of ‘disabled’ was constructed in this period, as

many people with a whole variety of impairments and disabilities were brought together into one category and, secondly, the employment opportunities for disabled people were to become just as much an issue of welfare support and intervention as reliant on economic decision-making.

2.2.3 *The position of women: implications for disability*

The position of women is important in our present discussion for three reasons: first, the increased involvement (or at least the perceived increased involvement) of a section of the population in employment, secondly, the linkage that was made between women and new ways of working, in particular part-time employment and, thirdly, the reconfiguring of different bodies in society and employment. The heightened profile of women in British society during the wars and after, it can be argued, made the involvement of disabled people in employment and wider society, more acceptable and easier.

This is perhaps the most controversial issue in the debate over the impact of the two Wars on British society. Marwick in 'The deluge' (1965) makes a strong argument for the 'positive' impact of war on the position of women in society, claiming that the particular experiences and conditions of war gave many women opportunities, socially and economically, that they would never have had, or even dreamt of, if war had not happened. Marwick (*et al*) has more recently (1990) softened his position and conceded that the criticisms of, for example Braybon (1995), are valid. Braybon argues that "women occupy a particular niche in the mythology that surrounds World War One" (p.141). She goes on to refute many of the claims of the time that women took over men's jobs, rejecting their domestic role and that their broader emancipation "effectively began in 1914 and was a direct result of the First World War" (p.141). She states, correctly I think, that "the reality is, as usual, more complex ... Women's role in industry can be described in great detail, yet the longer-term significance of this wartime work remains a subject of debate" (p.141). The important point here though is that, whatever the truth of the matter, there is no doubt that women had a greater profile after the two wars, in

negative reactions to women employees after the war, the reduction in female employment and the continued deeply-set sexism amongst many employers, women had most definitely made a mark on employment, a mark that could not be erased.

The Second World War saw a repeat of the First, in that women were again drawn into employment in the factories and the fields as replacements or 'substitutes' for the men leaving to fight at the warfront. Marwick (1974) argues that the second conflict built on the emancipatory effects of the first and gave women a new social and economic freedom, which lasted well beyond the end of the war. The considerably more cautious 'International Labour Office', in a study conducted shortly after the war, concluded that the changes in economic status experienced by women during the war were likely to be permanent (Smith, 1986). But in the early 1950s there began to be doubts about the significance of the war's positive impact on women. Evidence showed that the changes in women's economic position had been a temporary response to the demands of the crisis of war and that after 1945 most women returned to their 'traditional' position, as carer of the family (*ibid.*). More recent studies have generally supported this view (Smith, 1986; The Guardian, 1998). Smith and Rowbotham (in The Guardian, 1998) additionally argue that for many women the war actually reinforced their traditional roles, as the state and country expected them - while doing industrial or agricultural 'war work' - to continue to look after their children (albeit with the support of wartime nurseries) or, for those living outside the major cities, there was an expectation that they would host evacuated children (often becoming the 'mother' to several children). The wartime experiences of women were, according to this argument, exceptional and returned largely to 'normal' once the war ended and the men had returned.

The Second World War employed women to a far greater extent than in the first war - by September 1943, 7.25 million women (90 per cent of able-bodied single women between eighteen and forty) were involved in the war effort. However, many women were already employed in industry and commerce when the war began - there were about 5 million employed in 1939 and by 1943 this had only increased by 2.25 million (Smith, 1986). Many women had had an experience of employment before the war and so for most the war was not an 'emancipation', in fact the opposite as the unequal pay and

working conditions between men and women were more easily covered up by the chaos of war.

One of the central claims of the transformation of women's lives that the war supposedly produced was the entry of significant numbers of women into what were known as 'men's jobs' and a general 'evening out' out between the sexes. The claims were based on events such as women doing work during the war that was previously definitely reserved for men. However, as Smith (1986) argues, while the numbers of women that entered male industries, such as engineering, were significant, only a very small number actually did men's occupations. This was due to a combination of the reluctance of managers and the open hostility of male workers and the trade unions. In many cases where women were actually doing a man's tasks the employer reclassified the job as 'women's work' and so could both pay the woman less and keep the unions contented.

The demand for women to do war work was undermined by the Government's inability to provide sufficient childcare facilities. In response, the Government allowed women to work only part of the day so that they could also look after their children. The result was the beginning of the era of *part-time* work (The Guardian, 1998). Of course, people had worked non-full-time before, but this was the first time that it had been done on an organised, widespread basis; between 1942 and 1944 the number of female part-time employees increased from 380,000 to 900,000 (Smith, 1986). The birth of part-time working during the war was a significant event. This was the first time that employment had been formally organised to systematically allow for people to work less than a full week. It was to be the beginning of the 'flexible' employment practices that were used increasingly over the years from the end of the second war and particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Chapter Five).

It is perhaps best to think of the situation of women in employment during and after the wars in three time-spans: in the *short-term* women had a very real and tough employment experience, one that affected many of them profoundly (while for others it was a continuation of what they had been doing for years). In the *medium-term*, women probably didn't gain that much, as the country, post-war, tried to 'reclaim' its social

stability and one key element of this was judged to be family and women in the home. But, in the *long-term* the wars had changed Britain irrevocably, if only through the introduction of part-time working and the daughters of the women war workers thinking that work was what they wanted to do. Women's improved position in the workforce and in society more generally was a slow process perhaps only now coming to fruition (recently women reached 50 per cent of the workforce; The Guardian, 1998).

The importance of this to the overall discussion around disability and employment, has three elements. Firstly, the increased involvement of women in employment during the war meant that a group not normally associated with a wide variety of working experiences was involved in many areas of employment, most significantly some 'male' types of employment. As well as the involvement of the war injured in employment, there were longer-term consequences of the involvement of women in employment during the wars, in that it became understood that employment could be done by a broader range of people and that many people's talents would be wasted if they were excluded from employment. Secondly, this 'disruption' of the employment situation was also evident in the beginning of part-time working during the second war. The demand came from women who had children to care for and was extended to others, including some disabled people, who could not work a full week. The connection between time worked and work capability - a central theme of the debate in this research - had been made. Thirdly, there was a rethinking or 'refiguring' of the 'body' in employment, as women's 'weaker' bodies were employed in 'masculine' work and the relationship between body and work developed and changed. Disabled bodies, in their involvement in employment, also began to make this connection and challenge the ability needed to work successfully, whilst at the same recognising, through such changes as part-time working, that there were differences in capabilities for employment.

2.3 The Wars and disability

In the early years of the century the people who were later to make up the category 'disabled people' often lived in the most appalling conditions, or did not survive their impairments beyond childhood. Few were involved in work of any organised kind,

with begging and destitution the more common experiences. Jack London, an American author living in London, told of the people who could not survive the liberal economics of the early 1900s. In the 'People of the Abyss' (1903), he wrote,

"Throughout the whole industrial fabric a constant elimination is going on. The inefficient are weeded out and flung downward. Various things constitute inefficiency. The engineer who is irregular or irresponsible will sink down until he finds his place, say as a casual labourer ... Those who are slow and clumsy, who suffer from weakness of body or mind, or who lack nervous, mental and physical stamina, must sink down, sometimes rapidly, sometimes step-by-step, to the bottom. Accident, by disabling an efficient worker, will make him inefficient, and down he must go. And the worker who becomes aged, with failing energy and numbing brain, must begin the frightful descent which knows no stopping place short of the bottom and death In London one adult in four dies on public charity, either in the workhouse, the hospital or the asylum" (p.198-9).

The 'public charity' London speaks of were the institutions of the Poor Law, the only place which could possibly save people from what he describes as 'the bottom'. But the conditions of the workhouses, asylums and hospitals were poor and the support for people beyond basic clothes and food was minimal. The apparent choice of the time was survival by gaining employment or destitution. There was no distinction made between able-bodied and disabled people, except on the basis of 'efficiency' in relation to work; they were all 'poor'.

The 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration' (1904), discussed above, was commissioned in response to concerns about the people living in destitution, but more specifically because of the poor state of the soldiers returning from the Boer War. The Report made the following recommendations: to establish a 'Register of Sickness, not confined to infectious diseases', to 'create an Advisory Council within whose province questions touching the physical well-being of people fall' and, further, 'it may be necessary to take charge of the lives of those who, from whatever cause, are incapable of independent existence up to the standard of decency which it imposes'. The Report was an early attempt at the classification of people according to medical condition and a reinforcement of the powers of the Poor Law Guardians to continue to separate disabled people from the rest of society. This was reinforced by the 'Royal Commission on The Poor Laws and Relief of Distress' in 1909,

which emphasised that there must be a 'united effort to convert useless and costly inefficients into self-sustaining and respectable members of the community'.

So at the point when the First World War began, the condition of most of the people who would later be described as 'disabled' was poor, either confined to the institutions of the Poor Law or surviving on the streets, with the state concerned only that these were people who could not contribute to the 'efficiency' of the nation. There was no disability identity and there was no category of 'disabled people'.

The First World War, however, changed all that. The large numbers of men injured in the war - 2.5 million or 40 per cent of those who served - brought the issue of disablement sharply into focus. The nature of the war, that is, for the first time the full range of modern warfare techniques and equipment were used, meant that the injuries the soldiers experienced were severe. However, because of the improvement in medical care *both on the battlefield and in the hospitals back in Britain*, many more survived the war than had done so in South Africa 20 years before, albeit with significant impairments. As Stevenson (1984) notes, "the sight of blind and limbless ex-servicemen was a constant reminder in the inter-war years of the cost of war" (p.94). There was a financial as well as a human cost to the war too, as the Government began to pay out war pensions to those injured (the 1914 Injuries in War (Compensation) Act covered pensions, and the 1917 National Insurance Act was extended to cover 'persons suffering from disablement in consequence of the present war'). The injuries experienced by soldiers were not just physical, with a great many suffering from what was known at the time as 'shell-shock', what we now call 'combat neurosis' or 'post-traumatic stress disorder', a serious mental illness that involves loss of memory or intellectual functions as a result of the extreme psychological strain experienced in a war situation. Some never recovered and the experience blighted even those who returned to mainstream life from the hospitals where they were cared for after the war.

The deaths and disabilities of the war affected every part of the country, every class and every family. For the first time, the disabled were not just part of the mass of the poor, but a very particular group which crossed class boundaries. However, it is important to remember that this only applied to those disabled by the war, for those

impaired by disease or accident the situation remained much the same. It could be argued, then, that the war had little effect on the position of disabled people in Britain in general, for the men returning injured from the war had mostly previously been in employment and expected, despite their impairments, to return to work.

For those soldiers disabled by the war there was a demand for a swift return to work. The Government responded with the 1919 Disabled Men (Facilities For Employment) Act, which made employers 'pay compensation in respect of men disabled by service in HM Forces during the present war with a view to facilitating their employment'. Importantly, this was the first time that 'disability' had been officially talked about and related to employment.¹⁷ However, the major thrust of the state's action for men disabled by the conflict was the setting up of 'Government Training Centres' and the 'King's Roll', both in 1919. The Training Centres were intended to rehabilitate as far as possible men injured in the war for their return to the labour force. The King's Roll was an 'appeal to employers to employ a specified quota [normally 5 per cent] of disabled ex-servicemen'. It was not a compulsory scheme (but in 1921 the Government introduced contracts as inducements), however, it is widely acknowledged to have been successful, even getting the unemployment rate amongst disabled ex-servicemen below that of the general male population (Tomlinson, 1943). Yet the scheme rarely allowed men to return to the jobs they had held before the war, even though many employers had agreed to keep them open for them, instead they often experienced low-skilled factory work.

The King's Roll clearly applied only to men disabled by the action in the war (entitlement to the scheme was determined by the receipt of a war disability pension). It was specifically for those who had been able-bodied just a few years before and so had strong expectations of work, not those who were already disabled, congenitally or by accident or disease. The latter group received state attention in the form of welfare relief, usually delivered in the workhouse or asylum and were not encouraged to seek work. Also, it is interesting to note that the King's Roll scheme covered *all* those injured in the

¹⁷ This was for men only; disabled women and also, by extension, disabled people not disabled by the war were not included in the Act.

war, however minor the impairment. And the voluntary nature of the scheme (for employers) often resulted in the majority of those employed being the least disabled. Those most severely disabled often had to fall back on the same charity of the Poor Law as the other disabled. So, although the Training Centres and the King's Roll gave many disabled people the chance of employment, it was most often re-employment for men who had worked before the conflict only a few years before. The divisions that emerged between disabled people were significant. There were the slightly disabled ex-servicemen who had a good chance of a new career with Government support, then there were the disabled ex-servicemen who were too severely disabled to work and so had to survive on their pensions - both of these groups were, however, 'deserving' disabled people compared to the third group, the disabled people, men and women, who had been disabled before the conflict and being 'undeserving' in the eyes of the state did not benefit from the scheme or the war more generally.

The Second World War again produced a large number of injured soldiers and this time the Government was prepared. In December 1941, as the war began to turn in the Allies favour, the Tomlinson committee was established to prepare for the return of the soldiers. The 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Rehabilitation and Resettlement of Disabled Persons', known as 'the Tomlinson Report', was published in January 1943. It recommended a scheme of rehabilitation and training for those injured in the conflict and a return to employment for those who could; for those unable to work 'normally', 'sheltered employment' schemes were recommended.

The Report also recommended a 'Quota' of disabled persons that every employer should take on, certain reserved occupations for disabled people and a register of disabled persons. All three of these recommendations were introduced in the 1944 Disabled (Employment) Act, part of the post-war welfare state legislation. Most significantly this Act finally brought *all* disabled people into the frame, the division between those disabled by war and those disabled by disease and congenitally was ended.

The wars created two things: firstly, the conflicts themselves maimed and impaired many bodies and minds and, secondly, Government intervention and the establishment of a welfare state produced the category of 'disabled people'. Disability

became simultaneously an issue that affected many more people than it had before the wars, across the whole of society and one that created a social group that 'something' should be done about. The employment schemes of the post-war period were a coming together of these two things: the desire to provide employment for those injured in the war and a broader concern to provide for all disabled people.

2.4 The Wars and 'the body'

"I shall be mad if you get smashed about,
we've had some good times together, you and I".

From 'The soldier addresses his body', by Edgell Rickword (Silkin, 1981, p.138).

I would like to argue that the years from 1900 to 1950 were a very 'bodily' period. What I mean by this is that people's bodies - the physical and mental constitution of people - were at the centre of the key debates of the period. An obvious example is the damage to soldier's bodies in battle, either resulting in death or impairment. Less obvious is the concern with the physical well-being of the nation in the years before the First World War and the connection made between the state of people's bodies and the state of the economy. The changed diet of the population due to rationing, the bombing raids on the major British cities and the pervading sense of fear and death, made everyone's body a focus in society in this period. The process of war brought the body into the debate around disability and employment.

As noted earlier, there was a concern with the physical condition of the soldiers involved in the Boer War at the turn of the century (only 14,000 of the 20,000 men who volunteered were considered 'fit' enough to join; Bourke, 1996). The connection was made between the physical state of the soldiers and the 'health' of the nation - both medically and economically - and the Government decided that it was their responsibility to do 'something' about it. Their actions were spurred on by the three reports on poverty published in the early years of the century. Most notably, in the context of our present discussion, the 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration' (1904) published evidence which showed the poor physical state of people in Britain, chiefly through poverty and poor diet. Government action included a 'Register of sickness' for the whole population, and a strong advocacy message about diet and fitness.

This was supported by a series of welfare measures designed to support those out of work (including National Insurance, introduced in 1911) and those injured in the wars (1917). The Government perceived that it had a central role in improving the state of British people's bodies, both physically through diet and fitness and mentally through education reforms. This 'reshaping' was prompted by a concern with economic productivity, but also a sense that if a major war had to be fought again then British soldiers would have to be in good bodily condition. At the same time as this Government-led reshaping was taking place there was a strong, pervading sense of people's bodies, in particular men's and women's bodies and how they should be. So, even with high levels of poverty and poor diet, men, 'real' men, were understood to be athletic and strong and women, weak and gentle. The Government programmes of this period most certainly used these powerful ideas and images as their 'models' of reshaping of the body.

A major war did come, in 1914, and transformed the bodies (this includes minds *and* bodies) and lives of many men (and women) through injury, death and experience; five million men - or 22 per cent of the male population of Britain - were in active service between 1914 and 1918. From a country attempting to reshape its 'weak' (male) bodies as strong, as discussed above, the youngest, fittest, healthiest and brightest men's bodies were severely damaged by war. And on their return the rest of society was changed by the war, including those already disabled (Bourke, 1996). Bourke argues that the first war, "magnified the experience of deformity and the broader reality of disablement in 20th century Britain changed dramatically as a result. In this way, the war did not simply affect the population 'at risk' (that is, the servicemen), but it altered the lives of people physically disabled from birth or by accident as well. The war-maimed competed for limited economic and emotional resources with disabled civilians: in the end, there were no winners in this struggle. By the late 1920s, the respect that had initially been given to the fragmented bodies of war-mutilated men had ended" (p.31).

The injuries sustained by 31 per cent of soldiers were very serious. Nothing before, in war or industrial injury, had been as severe. Over 41,000 men had a limb amputated during the war, 272,000 suffered injuries to arms and legs which did not require amputation, 60,500 were wounded in the head or eyes and 89,000 sustained other serious damage to their bodies. The large number of injuries was due to the use for the first time

of highly explosive bombs that sprayed shrapnel on detonation. The wet, mud and generally unhealthy conditions of the trenches made infection commonplace and so amputation more likely. The scale of the damage to bodies came into public consciousness as those impaired returned to Britain. Throughout Britain people were affected, every class, every area and every family. And it wasn't just physical mutilation, there were many men affected by 'shell shock', their minds damaged, mentally distressed, memories and intellectual functions lost.

Rowland Luther, a soldier, wrote, 'I didn't mind dying, but the fear of mutilation played havoc with our minds. I had seen much of it, and wanted to die whole' (quoted in Bourke, 1996, p.56). The public saw the damaged bodies of the soldiers as 'marks' of courage and patriotism, not concerned with, or attempting to cover up, the personal agony and depression of the individual.

One of the central issues for the returning, damaged soldiers and for the Government was compensation for injury. The Government conceded that it had a responsibility to pay pensions to those who had been seriously injured in the war. However, where should the line be drawn, that is, who should be entitled and who should not? Bourke quotes the Minister of Pensions, "I think it will be agreed that we should pension all those who are 'Noble Heroes', but I see no reason why we should pension those who are not" (1996, p.62). So a system was developed to pay out the pensions, based on a complex grading relating to the degree of disablement (this replaced an earlier system linked to loss of earning capacity, abandoned as it became clear that there would not be sufficient finances). In some ways this 'equalised' the notion of disability as everyone would receive the same money for, say, the loss of an arm, irrespective of previous employment or social status. At the same time, industrial injuries were still being compensated on the basis of the earnings lost through time off work, not on the basis of the injury itself (a situation that was eventually changed after World War Two). Below is the table of pensions related to degree of disablement (Bourke, 1996):

*Specific injury**Proportion of
pension*

1. Loss of two or more limbs, loss of an arm and an eye, loss of a leg and an eye, loss of both hands or all fingers and thumb, loss of both feet, loss of a hand or foot, total loss of sight, total paralysis, lunacy, wounds or disease resulting in a man being permanently bedridden, wounds to internal organs or head involving total permanent disability, very severe facial disfigurement.	100 per cent
2. Amputation of right arm at shoulder joint.	90 per cent
3. Amputation of leg at hip or left arm at shoulder joint, severe facial disfigurement, total loss of speech.	80 per cent
4. Short thigh amputation of leg or of right arm above or through elbow, total deafness.	70 per cent
5. Amputation of leg above knee (other than 4.) and through knee or of left arm above or through elbow, or of right arm below elbow.	60 per cent
6. Amputation of leg below knee or the left arm below elbow, loss of vision in one eye.	50 per cent
7. Loss of thumb or four fingers of right hand.	40 per cent
8. Loss of thumb or four fingers of left hand, or of three fingers of right hand.	30 per cent
9. Loss of two fingers of either hand.	20 per cent

The hierarchy of different parts of the body - sight over hearing, right arms over left arms, speech over hearing, and the centrality of disfigurement - is very clear in the above table, as is the underlying connection to function. There is no inclusion of feeling, and only a single, extreme mention of the psychological problems of ex-servicemen. A soldier would only receive a pension for mental damage if classified as a 'lunatic'; lesser, but more common, psychological problems associated with 'combat neurosis' were not included in the compensation judgement. This 'valuing' of bodies had a significant

impact after the two wars in the classification of disabled bodies and the 'testing' for work capability.

A further issue was the rehabilitation of damaged bodies after the two conflicts. The Government, through the Training Centres (discussed in 2.3), attempted to 'reclaim' men's bodies from the damage they had experienced. The aim was two fold: to make the bodies capable of employment again and to ensure that the country would be fit to fight another war. The war also stimulated the Government and employers into wanting to 'survey' the body and in particular the male physique. As well as the Government centres for rehabilitation, where often quite brutal regimes of fitness training lay behind the push to make men 'complete' once again, there sprang up numerous physical training centres, camps and evening classes. Additionally, and perhaps strangely considering the damaging experience of war, military training, including drill and gym exercises, was promoted as an excellent way of getting fit, for physical body and mind. The body that was being reshaped after the two wars was the *male* body (and often a concentration on the physical body, not dealing with the mental body). There was a significant debate between a self-styled 'men's movement' of physical trainers who promoted strong images of masculinity, and those who denounced the masculine aggression of war (Bourke, 1996). War presented a moment of highly charged debate over the role, function and value of the male body. This debate would continue during the inter-war years and after the war, connecting to the debate around disability, which, it can be argued, remains dominated by male bodies and voices and physical disabilities.

There are several issues involved in the impact of this 're-figuration' on the understanding of disability and employment. Firstly, the understanding of disabled men as 'less than real' men, and so, the thinking went, only capable of 'less than real' employment - Bourke uses the example of the play, 'Unknown Warrior' (1923), which had a character who made toys, "I'm fed up with making silly toys. It's not work for a man, but we're not men now, with half our insides and half our limbs gone, it's a good enough job for us, I suppose" (quoted on p.75). Secondly and relatedly, work was seen as a way for disabled men to become real men again, to shed what were understood to be the 'feminising' traits of disability - work was understood as curative, so disability could be

‘cured’. And thirdly, those disabled by the wars joined the wider population of disabled people, spreading the experience of disability beyond the poor to all parts of society. Finally, the division between those disabled by war and those impaired by industrial disease and disease gradually (as the war years became more distant) began to blur and despite the higher pensions received by the war disabled a general experience of disability began to develop. However, importantly, the experience of all disabled people was altered dramatically by the wars, blurring the distinction between ‘passive’ and ‘active’ (i.e. war impaired) disabled, a distinction that had been the source of much of the poor treatment of disabled people before the wars. A shift, as Bourke argues, “in the balance of guilt and responsibility for disablement from the individual to the collective” (1996, p.39). Thus, the wars changed the whole language of disability, preparing the ground for the social reforms after World War Two and ultimately, it could be argued, for the development of the social model of disability in the mid-1970s.

2.5 The Wars and employment

Over the 50 years from 1900 to 1950 Britain moved from being a powerful heavy industry and trading country to a nation with its economic strength in manufacturing and the service industries. The involvement of the Government at the beginning of the century was slight, its role best considered as that of ‘enabler’, allowing free trade to flow and industry to operate unregulated. There has been some debate over the impact of war on economies (see Marwick, 1965) and the argument that many of the economic and technological changes would have happened anyway, but I want to argue that the two wars were instrumental in changing the style, shape and structure of British industry, its composition, productivity and its demand for employees. The extremes of economic conditions, and the particular strictures and demands of the wars, forced industry to be more reactive and responsive. And, at the same time, the Empire, upon which much of Britain’s industrial capacity was dependent, was put under pressure by the wars forcing a reorientation towards home and nearby markets. The Government too became more involved in the economy, in an attempt to control levels of supply and demand. This involvement changed the nature of economic life in Britain, as businesses rethought their

roles in the changed society and took on board some of the ideas of social responsibility promoted by the Government.

One of the key areas of Government involvement during the period of the wars was in industries particularly related to the war effort. The Government took decisions early on in both wars to take effective control of key industries, including mining, energy supply, transport construction and operation, crucial clerical and supply services and food manufacture and distribution. Additionally, the manufacture of munitions, tanks, guns, aircraft and other war equipment, was funded and controlled by the Government. All of these industries experienced a period of expanded output during the war period, with the added bonus of a Government guarantee of demand. The Government control, however, included a number of restrictions on the operations and performance of the companies, such as prices and markets and this led in some cases to resentment and, after the war, a strong call for the withdrawal of Government interference. The industries listed above became major sources of employment during the war period, employment that was 'approved' and 'guaranteed' by the involvement of Government. The sharp 'edge' of the labour market was thus 'worn down' during the war period.

One of the most significant changes in the shape of the economy over the war period was the expansion of the 'service' industries. There are many understandings of the term 'service' economy, but in this context it refers to clerical, distribution, retail and public service industries, i.e. all those activities that involve people selling service as a product, not a product in itself. The demands of war, particularly for the services of organisation, administration, health and communications, combined with the technological advances 'pushed on' by the war, meant that there was a boom in the scale and structures of these industries. There was, of course, an expansion in the employment opportunities in these industries and because of the nature of the work, combined with the situation of war, it allowed some people never before in employment to work and many to transfer from manufacturing and manual employment to the new service industries.

A key part of this 'opening up' of employment was the change in the nature of skills demanded by the new industries. New skills, with the balance tilted towards mental ability and away from physical skill, although of course both are involved in all areas of

employment. The new skills included organisation, management, customer interaction, communication and negotiation, which at that time were largely an unknown quantity and when discussed were seen as the 'natural' skills of women. Men's bodies, it was thought, were not capable of such skills, being best suited to physical work. The employment of men in such a context would lead to a loss of masculinity. Of course men *were* employed in the new service industries both during and after the wars, but always 'against the grain' of expectation. This understanding of service sector work as 'feminine' was consolidated by the large number of women who came into employment during the war period, initially to replace the men who had gone to the warfront and later in their own right, as employers realised the skills of many of the women. The service sector industries attracted a lot of women - many more than the frequently quoted example of non-traditional women's work, i.e. working in the munitions factories - and retained many of these women after the war had ended (women in traditionally male industries fared much worse at the end of the wars, as the men returned).

The final significant issue is the change of work patterns during the war period. Before the first war the vast majority of people worked a standard 40 or 50 hour week, working every day, with family and other caring responsibilities being done in most cases by women. During the war, the Government, in an attempt to get more women into the workforce to replace the men lost to the front, created a large number of 'war nurseries' to care for under school age children. However, even with this provision, the Government and companies realised that to get the best out of the women employees and at the same time ensure the best care of the children, they would have to introduce the concept of organised part-time working. There had, of course, been people who had worked non-standard hours ever since the start of the industrial revolution and it could be argued that prior to that all work was based on the 'natural' flexible rhythms of the seasons, but this was the first time that work had been *organised* in this way. It was a significant moment: the beginning of the flexible employment practices that are now an integral part of employment in Britain.

In terms of disability and employment, there are several issues which emerge here: firstly, the whole area of employment, its meaning, the skill types, the expectations,

was challenged and changed by the war period. The involvement of disabled people in employment, so poor and limited before the wars, *had* to be affected by this 'disruption'. Secondly, the involvement of Government in the economy during the war had a long-term effect, a rethinking of the economy as not purely economic, but involving social responsibility too. Thirdly, the number of women that became involved in employment during and after the wars opened up employment to an extent for other people traditionally excluded from employment, such as disabled people. In other words, the disruption of employment allowed new thinking to be done. Fourthly, the new skills in the new service industries possibly allowed those - particularly women - with different skills to be involved in employment. And fifthly, the 'beginning' of part-time and flexible working also began to take into account the different demands of people for different ways of working and the lack of necessity to 'fit into' prescribed ways of working.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has contended that the two world wars, which made up a significant part of the first half of the twentieth century, had a significant impact on the understanding and representation of disability, employment and the 'body' in Britain.

Central to the argument has been the direct impact of the action of war on the (male) soldiers who fought at the front. The damage to their physical bodies and minds was severe and had a tremendous long-lasting affect. Never before had British people been so badly and heavily 'damaged' in war and the country's reaction was one of shock, guilt and a desire to repay the men. All of these responses led to shifts in the understanding of disability and the actions to try and repair the damage. The less direct impacts of the war were just as significant. The increased involvement of Government, the improvement in welfare provision and the raised profile of women in society and the economy, were all largely due to the process of war and created the context for the changes in understanding and action in relation to disabled people.

The position of disabled people changed significantly during the fifty year period, from being part of the mass of the poor to being a designated 'group' as part of the new welfare state. The experience of the war, the injuries, the return home, the attempts at

rehabilitation and in particular the fact that all parts of society were equally affected, brought disability into the public consciousness where it remained at least until the construction of the welfare system in the 1940s.

The number of disabled people in employment was probably not that much higher after the two wars than before (although it is impossible to know for certain as no accurate data exists), as employers pinpointed women and returning soldiers, but the nature of employment and the expectations of employees had changed significantly and this would be to the benefit of disabled people in the years after the wars. In particular, the challenging of the nature of work, the meaning of an employee and the introduction of part-time working undoubtedly ‘opened up’ employment as a possibility for those traditionally excluded.

Chapter Three Understanding ‘disability’

3.1 Introduction

How, then, should ‘disability’ be understood giving the foregoing discussion around disability and employment and the impact of the two wars? There is no clear definition, no agreed explanation and no common approach to disability. It is an issue that is represented and understood in many different ways. Perhaps the best way of tackling it is by *not* trying to understand it, but in developing an approach for *thinking about* disability.

The Introduction argued that disability is a *process*, an unfinished, ongoing ‘materialisation’ of the social and cultural constructions of disability; that is, a conceptualisation of disability as not a fixed thing, but as a continually renegotiated and reproduced identity. This chapter will ‘lead into’ a subsequent development of this conceptualisation, by considering the different ways that disability has been understood, or, as the above paragraph suggests, looking at the ways it has been ‘thought about’.

Although there is no common approach to disability, there is, as Chapter One noted, a dominant conceptualisation. This understands disability as an issue of individual tragedy that requires medical and welfare support. This understanding is evident in many forms of representation, and has consequences in Government policy making and general public opinion. This chapter will discuss the main themes of this dominant understanding, using evidence from different representations of disability. Importantly, though, this dominant understanding has been challenged by, primarily, disabled academics. The alternative approach to disability develops a sense of disability as a social issue of poor access and discrimination, that requires social solutions and civil rights. In all of this debate, ‘disability’ remains uncertain, impossible to pin down, a shifting social and physical-mental entity.

The chapter then, crucially, begins to develop another way of understanding disability, or, as argued above, a way of ‘thinking about’ what disability ‘is’. The third conceptualisation discussed earlier - an *embodied* notion of disability - is a response to the gaps that have appeared as the ‘social model’ has been stretched too thinly to cover

the whole array of issues related to disability. It is an approach - further developed in the next chapter - that attempts to make the connection between the social understandings and the physical-mental elements of disability.

3.2 Understandings of disability

First, it is important first to be clear that there is no single, absolute understanding of disability. There are of course definitions of 'disability', for example in the recent Disability Discrimination Act, for benefit entitlements and many businesses have definitions of disability in their employment policies. This is important, for, as Oliver argues, there is 'power in definitions' (1990), as if people are defined in a certain way they are often treated as such. However, definitions are not the same thing as understandings. A definition can be encapsulated in a few lines; an understanding, on the other hand, is often a much more slippery phenomenon. Crucially, understandings usually operate 'below the surface', so that their identification is often difficult, or meets a response of 'well, it just is'.

3.2.1 Disability as 'individual'

The notion of disability as an individual issue is fundamental to the dominant understanding of disability. In this understanding disabled people are impaired and responsible for the effects of that impairment, i.e. the disadvantage 'caused' by the disability. The disability is centred in them and any actions that are taken to 'improve' the person's situation are likewise focused on the individual.

It has been argued that the notion of the disabled person as an individual emerged in the industrial revolution, as the processes of capitalism constructed people as 'units of production' (Oliver, 1990). Oliver argues that the industrial period demanded "nothing less than the ideological construction of the individual" (p.44). This individual was a self-interested, rational, profit-seeking being, who was willing to engage in employment and consumerist relationships based on an exchange of labour and money. While this is certainly an oversimplification, it is important in that it made the individual connection between worker and employer and between consumer and product. And crucially for our

discussion, it is important because a central part of the growth of industrialism was the associated growth of institutions for people classified as disabled - or to be more precise¹⁸ - people who were 'mad', 'crippled', or 'infirm'. There was hence a separation of people based on, Oliver argues, the ableness (or not) of the individual person. Oliver further makes the connection with industrialism, "The idea of disability as individual pathology only becomes possible when we have an idea of individual able-bodiedness, which is itself related to the rise of capitalism and the development of wage labour" (p.47). It was, the argument suggests, when individuals could not meet the demands of individual employment that they were classified as disabled.

Imrie (1996) has argued that the divisions between able-bodied and disabled people that were constructed in the industrial period in the 19th century were allied to scientific and philosophical notions of individualism that involved "explaining the nature or essence of society purely in terms of facts about individuals" (p.27). Thinkers such as Charles Darwin made the connection between the individual and their social position. The cultural power of such thinking meant that it became deeply imbued in society and in the understanding of disability.

There is a close connection drawn between the person and their impairment. This may seem obvious as, of course, it is the person who has the physical or mental difference, but this is a highly significant linkage. It is the understanding that it is the responsibility of the person for this 'abnormality', which is important. There is still a tendency, if not to state that the person 'deserved' their impairment, to suggest that there must be some action that precipitated it (such as bad parenting or bad driving). And the interaction with society is often seen as the effect that the disabled person will have on society, not how society may affect the person.

3.2.2 *'Victims and heroes'*

Portrayals of disabled people in the media - in newspapers, television and radio, and advertising - are dominated by a dual understanding of disability. Disabled people are usually presented either as passive 'victims' of violence and discrimination, or as 'heroes'

¹⁸ As Chapter Two argued, a collective notion of 'disability' had not been developed at this point.

who make great efforts to overcome their disadvantaged position. Representation, then, is commonly ‘all or nothing’, as Saxton and Howe argue, “On the one hand our lives are thought to be pitiful, full of pain; on the other hand, we are seen as inspirational beings” (1988, p.105).

This understanding stems from a belief that disabled people are ‘extreme’ human beings, with bodies that cannot be considered as normal. Extreme people with extreme bodies, who therefore have extreme experiences. There is also an expectation in this understanding that disabled people will attempt to emulate the behaviour of able-bodied people in an effort to become ‘normal’. But in this attempt they are expected almost to be ‘more than’ human to (over)compensate, or if not then to be ‘less than human’ and become a victim.

A selection of headlines from national and local newspapers illustrates the point:	
<i>Disabled victims of violence</i>	<i>My secret Multiple Sclerosis hell</i>
(The Guardian, 20th September 1995a)	(Daily Mirror, 11th January 1996)
<i>Disabled artist overcomes her handicap</i>	<i>Double delight for super Rose</i>
(MK Herald, 25th July 1996)	(MK Citizen, 25th April 1996)

The words ‘victims’, ‘hell’, ‘overcomes’, and ‘super’ in these headlines clearly show the duality of the representation of disabled people. There are many similar examples on television, where disability is usually represented as individual stories of triumph or tragedy and in advertising, which often uses disability as a metaphor for weakness, extra sensitivity or overcoming difficulty. A good example is The Guardian’s advertisement that represented Britannia as old and disabled in a wheelchair to make the point that Britain was an ailing and weak nation.

The common issue here is a focus on the disabled person as a fixed entity rather than on disability as a process. The disability is in the person and their only options are to play one of the two ascribed roles, victim or hero. To just ‘be’, to be an everyday disabled person, is not an option, or rather is a difficult option to choose as there is little space ‘inbetween’ the duality for a different identity.

The representation of disabled people as ‘more than human’ does not always relate to ‘good’ things. Another common connection that is made is between disability and evil. A famous instance of a such a disabled character, and of disability being used as

a metaphor for evil and hatred, is Shakespeare's Richard III. The play is based as much on Shakespeare's creative imagination as on historical fact. There is no evidence that Richard was a hunchback, as he is usually portrayed, but there is evidence that he was a vicious man who killed or conspired to kill several members of his family. Shakespeare portrays Richard as twisted in both body and mind. Since he cannot succeed as a lover because of his deformity, so the play's story goes, he is determined to succeed as a villain. A few lines from the play show this clearly:

"Cheated of feature by dissembling nature, Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time, Into this breathing world scarcely made up, And that so lamely and unfashionable, the dogs bark at me as I halt by them" (Shakespeare, 1961).

Such association between disability and moral corruption is common in present day literature, film and television. Disabled characters - invariably played by able-bodied actors - are commonly used to portray villains, killers and 'monsters'. Good examples include Quasimodo, the socially reclusive bell ringer, with a hunchback and speech impediment, in 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame', Captain Hook in 'Peter Pan', the facially disfigured phantom in 'Phantom of the Opera' and the visually-impaired drug baron in 'True Romance'. In all of these cultural representations, disability is understood as deviance, bodily and morally, and it plays on the deep-seated feelings that people have about disabled people, most strongly, a fear of the damaged body and the damaged mind that is within it.

3.2.3 *Normality and abnormality*

The notion of 'normality' has played a central role in the conceptualisation of disability and disabled people. Davis (1995) argues that 'normality' is a powerful and dominant ideology in Western society. Everything we do - what we think, eat, earn and consume - is considered by some comparison to a 'norm' or average. Davis extends this to disability, arguing that the disabled body has often been understood in terms of its negative relation to a standard, normal, able-bodied body. Importantly, Davis contends that the idea of 'normality' is a relatively recent concept, entering the English language in the mid-19th century. This is different to the perfect bodies of Ancient Greece, such as Aphrodite, which no one could achieve, just aspire to and wonder at. Davis argues that it

was the emergent French statisticians of the 19th century, with their development of the notion of 'average' and by extension the 'average man' (or 'l'homme moyen'), that helped create the average or normal as the 'ideal'. Davis quotes Quetelet, "an individual who epitomised in himself all the qualities of the average man, would represent at once all the greatness, beauty and goodness of that being" (Davis, 1995, p.27). Importantly for the overall argument of the present research, this 'averageness' applied not only to the morality of the person, but to the body as well. If we listen to Quetelet again, "deviations more or less great from the mean have constituted [for artists] ugliness in body as well as vice in morals and a state of sickness with regard to the constitution" (*ibid.*, p.103). And further, Quetelet saw progress as a process of reducing deviation from the average.

So Davis argues that the average or norm is an ideal condition, something that most people already fit into, and those who do not - known in the normality debate as 'deviants' - must endeavour to do so. Disabled people are often understood as being on the fringes, 'deviating' from the norm. The construction of the normal body, in turn, created the notion of a disabled body, a body that was *not normal*. Davis makes the connection between the statisticians of the mid-19th century, the eugenicists and Darwinian scholars. All, he argues, understood deviance from normality as something to be solved - statistics as the identification of the norm, eugenics as the scientific 'solution' to defective bodies and Darwinian theory as the evolutionary deselection of 'defective' nature. The body is central to the normality thesis, as the connection between bodily state and 'position' in the normality framework is clear and strong. As Davis argues, "The person enters in an identical relationship with the body, the body forms the identity and the identity is unchangeable and indelible as one's place on the normal curve ... the marks of physical difference become synonymous with the identity of the person" (1995, p.31-2). The body is central and it is also fixed in this line of argument; it is people who deviate from the average, not the average which deviates from the people.

The notion of 'normality', then, is central to the dominant understanding of disability. This idea has been developed in particular in psychology, where the connection has been made between impairment and the psychological state of person, that is, disabled people have a clear sense that they are different or 'abnormal' (Abberley,

1993). We can link this discussion back to the first of our themes, 'Disability as 'individual'', and see that psychological notions of abnormality are located in the individual; the impaired person responds to their state by understanding themselves as deviant. Goffman extended this to society in his 'interactionist' account, 'Stigma' (1963), in which he provides a pessimistic analysis of society understanding disability as different and abnormal, based on an 'natural' human fear of the unknown. Abberley argues that Goffman's ideas, still used by many psychologists, "justify the 'abnormality' of disabled people by claiming that it is inevitable ... [disabled people's] abnormality is explained ultimately in terms of impairment" (1993, p.110-1).

The notion of 'normality' that emerged in the mid-19th century and the associated notion of 'abnormality', combined with the powerful concept of individualism, as Imrie puts it, "set the broader theoretical context within which the dominant theorisations of disability have developed and through which our understanding of disabled states has emerged" (1996, p.27). This understanding of disability has been supported by the World Health Organisation's definition of disability, which includes the phrase, 'disability is not being able to perform an activity considered normal for a human being' (quoted in Imrie, 1996, p.36). Also, the notion of disability as *individual abnormality* is still dominant in social theories, one outcome of which has been the 'normalisation' thesis, an idea developed in the early 1970s that pushed the 'incorporation' of disabled people into 'mainstream' society. It had laudable aims, but as Dalley (1992) argues, its implication was the promotion of social conformity and the evaluation of difference. But the debate is an important one, because in our society where notions of abnormality and deviance are still powerful, one does have to consider how those deemed to be 'abnormal' are to be understood and responded to.

3.2.4 *Disability and dependence*

The issue of dependency, the reliance in a power relation of an individual or group on another individual or group, is a central feature of the disability debate. The converse is of course independence, the 'positive' half of the dualism and the situation that everyone 'should' strive for. This is independence financially, socially and

intellectually. Of course, no-one is truly independent and what the term commonly refers to is quite precise in so far as everyone should have employment and not require direct help from government social policy. In relation to disability, there are two themes in the debate around dependency: firstly, the policies of welfare states that 'create' groups of people dependent on state help and, secondly, individuals' need for help because of their impairment. On the first theme, there is a long-standing situation, discussed earlier, that disabled people are in a disadvantaged position in employment and so become reliant on the state for income. As Illsley contends, "[Disabled people's] condition or situation makes them economically unproductive and hence economically and socially dependent" (1981, p.328). The welfare state itself is understood to create dependency, through legislation such as the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 that aimed to provide services for people, and according to Shearer (1981) in the process reinforced the notion that "people who happen to have disabilities are people who are 'helpless'" (p.82). The provision of professional care services also generates dependence between professional and client, a situation that Barnes explores in 'Cabbage syndrome: the social construction of dependence' (1990), a study of day care institutions. Secondly, at the individual level, many factors combine to create a feeling of dependency within a disabled person - the experience of separate 'special' education, the medical control exerted by doctors (see below), the low expectations of teachers, social workers and employers and the work of charities raising money to 'help' disabled people. All of these elements make it very common for disabled people to feel dependent on other people, on professional services, on the welfare state and on society in general. As Oliver argues, "the dichotomy of dependence/independence has been a significant influence on both the way disabled people are perceived in general and on the development of social policies geared towards them in particular" (1993, p.59).

3.2.5 *The medicalisation of disability*

Medical practices are central to the lives of many disabled people, from, as Oliver (1990) argues, the identification of an unborn foetus as disabled or not, through to the deaths of old people from disabling conditions. Much of the medical 'intervention' in

disabled people's lives is both necessary and useful, to treat illness, provide drugs to stabilise conditions and to operate to improve mobility or visual impairment. However, there is a more fundamental issue here, that is, that the medical diagnosis and intervention can become all there is, leaving individual and social needs and difficulties out of the debate.

The dominance of medical thinking in understanding disability stems from the rise in the medical profession in the Victorian era as scientific thought began to establish itself in British society as the way to understand the world. Stone (1985) makes the connection between medical power and the economy, arguing that the medical diagnosis of disability was required to sort out people into those who could work and so be independent and those who could not work and so required state help. Those who could not work were often housed in institutions, such as Poor Law workhouses and the medical diagnoses were central to keeping people within these places. Through this position of responsibility doctors acquired power and respect in society.

Hughes (1998) argues that the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act was the 'full flowering of the medical discourse on disability'. This Act classified 'mental defective' into four categories, 'idiots', 'imbeciles', 'feeble-minded persons' and 'moral imbeciles'. At the time this was seen as the increased sophistication of medical science in this area, but its true significance was the connection made between these medical classifications and the treatment of the people so classified, i.e. a life of institutionalised care. As Hughes argues, "Here we have a striking example of the closely interwoven relationship between medico-scientific knowledge and the ... construction of particular categories of people who are systematically differentiated and excluded from the 'healthy' and 'normal' majority" (1998, p.71).

The medical understanding of disability, or disability as 'individual pathology', has been significantly supported by the World Health Organisation's definition of disability, which emphasises the damaged biology of the disabled body and, further, legitimates the complex classification system of 'types' of disability (Imrie, 1996). The impairment, or biological state, of the person, for example visual impairment, *becomes* the disabled person. The understanding of such a strong connection between medically-

defined state and identity owes much to the dominance of the medicalisation of disability. This understanding has received a recent boost with the debate around genetic 'mapping', testing and manipulation. The increasing ability to 'identify' the genetic material 'responsible' for an impairment is highly contested: it could allow improved drugs to be developed for the people already affected, but it also makes possible the early identification of the impairment and hence the option of the termination of a 'disabled' foetus, an option many disabled people would find unacceptable (The Guardian, 1997e).

3.2.6 *The dualism of ability and disability*

The above discussion has had running through it a fundamental assumption, namely that there is a clear dividing line between ability and disability. A person, in the dominant understanding of disability, is *either* able *or* disabled, there is no space of the 'inbetween'. This dualism links up with other dualisms discussed above, i.e. individual/group, dependent/independent, normal/abnormal, with a significant power relation in process. Ability is 'dominant' over disability, in the same way as independence is 'better than' dependence and normality 'superior' to abnormality. In all of these divisions people with impairments are on the negative side, understood as different, inferior, as the 'other'.

There are several issues here: firstly, Imrie (1996) argues that it is an 'ableist' conceptualisation of 'disability' that sees it as homogeneous with no internal variation, when in fact disability is a falsely unifying concept, "that includes people with a wide range of physical and mental impairments [and] is by no means an obvious category" (Scotch, 1988, p.159). The World Health Organisation's three-fold definition of disability (see 3.3.2) attempts to encompass the whole of disability and in so doing conceals the many different types of disability and more significantly places the issue of disability in the individual. It is the WHO's lack of focus on social and environmental issues that places the disability issue in the individual and so disability becomes a single category, the opposite of ability. Secondly, the clear distinction between ability and disability is maintained and reinforced by Government policy and practice. A good example of this is the Government sponsored survey of disabled people (Martin *et al*, 1988) which

attempted to measure the extent of disability in the UK. In such an exercise there inevitably had to be a definition of disability and a desire to find an answer to the question of how many disabled people there were. The dividing line between ability and disability had to be drawn. Hughes (1998) has argued that attempts to measure disability can be understood as “an attempt to delude ourselves that disability is finite, ‘out there’ and someone else’s problem” (p.58). The recent Disability Discrimination Act (1995) has taken this Government delimiting of disability a stage further. A person who wants to take legal action against an employer or service provider has to first ‘prove’ that they are disabled. The Act has developed a complex set of ‘tests’ to decide whether a person is disabled or not. As such, the dualism of ability and disability is central to Government policy and administration.

Thirdly, Government policy, as described above, and cultural understandings of disability make it very difficult to think beyond the dualism of ability and disability. The Cartesian understanding of the world, as consisting of binary relations such as male/female, black/white and, most fundamentally, mind/body, does not allow for people to fall between the two. A person is either able-bodied and has all the associated characteristics, i.e. is normal, fit and able, or is disabled and is abnormal, unfit and unable. The key issue here is of change versus no change. The dualism of ability and disability understands both elements as fixed and stable, even natural. For there to be an allowance for ‘blurring’ of the two categories, or for someone to move between the two, then some sense of change or process has to be happening. Again the focus of this understanding is on the individual, as a fixed entity, as any notion of change would have to involve social and environmental processes.

Lastly, there has been little attention paid to the concept of ‘ability’. This is a common issue in the theorisations of the dualisms, i.e. it is the ‘minority’ element that receives the public and academic attention, for the reason that they - women, black people, gay people and disabled people - are understood as ‘abnormal’ or ‘deviant’ and so must be studied in order to analyse, and ultimately stabilise, society. ‘Ability’ like disability is understood to be a homogeneous group, with little or no internal variation. This is, of course, no more the case than for disabled people, but it is essential for the

current understanding of disability that the 'same' is uniform so that it can clearly oppose the 'other'. Despite the importance of a deconstruction of the notion of 'ability' there is, as yet, no 'room' for this to happen, because the dominant understanding of disability as part of a dualism does not allow for such a debate.

3.3 Conceptualising disability

The very idea of conceptualising 'disability', that is, trying to produce systems or models with which to think about the meaning(s) of disability, would not have been possible a few years ago. Disability is a phenomenon that until recently has been thought of (or more accurately, not thought of, but assumed) as an individual, medical issue. The above section considered the major themes that make up the dominant way that disability is understood - as individual, victim or hero, abnormal, dependent, medical and biological and as a discrete identity subordinate to ability. It can be argued that there are two central concepts running through these themes, what Imrie (1996) calls *individual pathology*, i.e. disability as an issue for the individual, not society, and disability as something that is wrong biologically requiring medical attention. It is important to state here that 'individual' and 'biological' are not necessarily the same. The dominant individual understanding of disability which arose from the Cartesian dualisms was reinforced by the emergent biological theory and then set in stone by the activities of the medical profession in the late 19th century, so developing the notion of 'individual pathology'.

3.3.1 *The medical model of disability: the dominant understanding*

The above section discussed the components of the dominant 'individual pathology' or medical model of disability that has developed over the last few hundred years. Importantly, this model has only been 'named' in the last few years in the process of challenging the understanding. Such is the strength and depth of the dominant discourse of disability that it was assumed to be the only way to understand disability.

Central to the medical model is, of course, medical practice. What the medical profession, and the institutional structures that support it, did was 'concretise' the powerful assumptions of disability as individual and biological that had existed for

several hundred years. Such institutionalisation made disability as individual pathology real and so more difficult to change. Hughes (1998) uses the example of mental health to illustrate the point. There were power struggles between different medical 'experts' in the nineteenth century over how to 'manage' the 'insane' or 'mad'. These struggles resulted in many people with mental illness (and many without) being officially 'classified' as mad and placed in asylums. There was general agreement though among the experts that madness was a medical issue, "Insanity is purely a disease of the brain. The physician is now the responsible guardian of the lunatic and must remain so" ('Journal of Mental Science', 1858, quoted in Hughes, 1998, p.69). The segregation of mentally ill people and many other disabled people, in asylums in the nineteenth and early twentieth century made the powerful connection between disability, medicine and difference. Medical practices linked with the social policy philosophy and so strengthened the powerful individual pathology discourse of disability.

Another area of medical practice - psychology - has contributed towards the powerful entrenchment of the individual pathology discourse of disability. The Wood Committee, a group of medical 'experts', in 1929 made a connection between 'intelligence' and psychological 'problems' and in so doing a new science was born. Over the next 50 years, psychology established itself as the 'science of the mind' testing many 'deviants', such as criminals, 'delinquents' and disabled people. One concrete outcome of this new science was the Mental Health Act (1959), which placed the disability or abnormality in the brain and mind of the individual and then, crucially, advised medical intervention and treatment (Hughes, 1998). The power of the medical profession ensured that disability was both understood and treated as individual pathology.

Such an understanding and response to mental health and disability has been mirrored in the experience of people with physical impairments. The desire of society to 'cure' the impairments of disabled people and so 'bring them into' the realm of the able-bodied and 'normality', has been a very powerful force. This force has led to the brutal and inappropriate treatment of many disabled people. As Oliver has argued (1990) there is an important role for medical techniques in the lives of disabled people, such as drug treatments, operations and equipment. However, 'clinical diagnosis' dominates the

medical profession and so the pathological condition of the person becomes the focus of the medical intervention, with little attention paid to the social context of that condition. Oliver also argues that medicalisation - the diagnosis and treatment of conditions, the separation of disabled people in asylums and hospitals and the classification of types of disability - has at its heart a desire to order society, to deny complexity and to maintain the powerful dualisms, including able and disabled. Indeed, the medical profession is responsible for the divide between mental and physical impairment and disability. This division has become accepted and the two 'types' of 'conditions' have been treated quite differently. As with the ability-disability dualism, there is no notion of crossover or blurring between the two halves of the binary.

This sub-section has argued that the dominant individual understanding of disability has been reinforced and reproduced by the practices and institutional structures of the medical profession. The powerful discourse of disability as 'individual pathology' has become, through medical practice, embedded in social processes. Such a 'deeply' understood conceptualisation of disability has been very difficult to shift, or even think about.

3.3.2 The social model: challenging the individual pathology understanding of disability

Any sense that disability had been conceptualised as individual pathology did not come about until the mid-1970s. Before then it was assumed that disability was an issue for individuals, a 'personal tragedy' that had to be dealt with. Oliver describes this as the 'dominant ideology' or hegemony around disability,

"The hegemony that defines disability in capitalist society is constituted by the organic ideology of individualism, the arbitrary ideologies of medicalisation underpinning medical intervention and personal tragedy underpinning much social policy. Incorporated also are ideologies related to concepts of normality, able-bodiedness and able-mindedness" (1990, p.44).

The challenge to the dominant understanding of disability began in 1976, with the publication of the document, 'Fundamental principles of disability', by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). Oliver describes the text as "timeless", as it, "raises issues about definitions of disability, the role of experts, the

place of experience and the nature of the political process ... issues that have not been resolved, and around which arguments are, and will remain, heated” (1996, p.19). The document emerged out of the formation of two organisations, the Disablement Income Group (DIG) and UPIAS, which were controlled by disabled people, the former to campaign for a national disability income and the latter to represent the views of those disabled people in residential care. The document begins with ‘A statement of fundamental principles’, which includes the following,

“The Union maintains that, far from being too concerned with the ‘cause’ of disability, the ‘experts’ in the field have never concerned themselves with the real cause at all”, and then the crucial claim, “*In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people*” (UPIAS, 1976, quoted in Oliver, 1996, p.22, emphasis added).

This was the first time that the ‘cause’ of disability had been attached to society and not to the individual. The document explained further,

“Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. To understand this it is necessary to grasp the distinction between physical impairment and the social situation, called ‘disability’, of people with such impairment” (*ibid.*).

The document also provided a challenge to the definition of disability that was used in Government documents and policy. The 1968 OPCS survey of disability (published as Harris, 1971) used a three-fold definition of disability, which had greater significance beyond the initial survey, as it was used as the basis for the World Health Organisation’s ‘International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps’, devised by Wood (1981) and later used for the UK Government survey (Martin *et al*, 1988).

The Harris report used a three-fold definition:

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|--------------|---|
| ‘Impairment’ | ‘any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function’. |
| ‘Disability’ | ‘any restriction or lack of ability (resulting from impairment) to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being’. |
| ‘Handicap’ | ‘a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal, depending on age, sex, social, and cultural factors, for that individual’. |

According to Harris, disability is the result of the impairment and the cause of the handicap, i.e. there is a causal linkage between the three experiences. The UPIAS document offered its own definition, this time two-fold, which echoed its 'social' approach to disability (UPIAS, 1976, p.3-4, quoted in Oliver, 1996, p.22):

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 'Impairment' | 'lacking part or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body'. |
| 'Disability' | 'the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities'. |

This definition makes no causal link between impairment and disability (impairment being just a state of the body) and instead make the causal connection *between society and disability*. This 'social' approach was developed by Finkelstein in 'Disability and the helper/helped relationship: an historical view' (1981a), in which he analysed the relationship between disabled people and their carers. In 1990, Oliver, in the landmark text, 'The politics of disablement', pushed this approach further, producing a 'social theory of disability'. In this critique of the dominant understanding of disability - which Oliver identifies as medical and psychological - he asks a question at the start of the book,

"Why is disability individualised and medicalised within capitalist society? This gives rise to a number of other questions, the first of which is whether disability is individualised and medicalised in all societies. If the answer to this is no, then it raises two further questions: how did individualisation and medicalisation come about within capitalism and, further, what are the chances of mounting challenges to this individualisation and medicalisation within this type of society?" (1990, p.xi-xii).

There are several important things to note here: firstly, that Oliver sees the dominant understanding of disability as individual and medical. Secondly, his critique of capitalism society implies a Marxist conception of society, one that stresses the operation of the economy. And, thirdly, he proposes that disability is a socio-cultural phenomenon which can be different in different societies. The latter is highly significant as it begins to see disability as a changing and shifting socially constructed phenomenon or identity.

That disability is understood and experienced differently in differently countries and cultures is a central part of Oliver's analysis and one of his most convincing. He argues that both disability and impairment are 'culturally produced' and goes on to show that disability and impairment are experienced differently in societies across the world. And, more importantly, how these societies respond to disability varies too. Oliver quotes Kleinman, "Beliefs about sickness, the behaviours exhibited by sick persons and the ways in which sick persons are responded to by family and practitioners ... are cultural constructions, shaped distinctly in different societies" (1980, p.38 quoted in Oliver, 1990, p.14). Oliver goes on to use an anthropological approach to illustrate Kleinman's contention. He cites Barrett and McCann's 1979 study of an isolated tribe in West Africa, where many of the population were born with only two toes, but how this made no difference to their experience. Oliver states that "such differences would be regarded as pathological in our society and the people so afflicted subjected to medical intervention" (p.14). There are many other examples: Gwaltney's study in a Mexican village showed that people's blindness could only be understood in terms of their own culture, "The prevailing belief that filarially-induced blindness is the consequence of omnipotent, divine intervention tends towards the emergence of an essentially accommodative cultural response" (1970, pp.v-vi). The response to blindness in this culture was, very differently to our own, reverence rather than pity. Gwaltney found that the local community responded to the blindness by providing child guides for the blind people, social accolades for those who were deferential to blind people and social rejection for those who were not, and an elaborate system of social support to ensure that they participated fully in the life of the community. Most crucially for Oliver's overall argument, was Gwaltney's observation that because the blindness was caused by the environment and so could affect anyone, then the blindness was a problem for the whole community, not just for the individuals affected. Groce's study (1985) of a community in New England which had a high proportion of people with a hearing impairment (a genetic cause), showed a quite remarkable societal response: rather than being excluded from the community, the society gradually became bilingual, in speech and sign language. Full integration, rather than exclusion, was the result for these disabled people.

Two anthropologists, Hanks and Hanks concluded that the disabilities of people are particular to the social structures and situations of the society in question. They argued that the ways disabled people are understood are “as varied as any normal group. The gamut runs from ruler to outcast, from warrior to priest, from infant to aged” (1980, p.12). Oliver takes a particular theme from their work. He states that what theirs and other anthropological studies show is that “the individualised, tragic view of disability in modern industrial society is not universal by any means” (1990, p.18).

Oliver proceeds in his text to develop a social theory of disability which takes the above conclusion and extends it by arguing that if disability is understood in such diverse ways in other cultures, then surely the dominant understanding we have in Western society can be challenged and replaced with a new interpretation of disability. Oliver bases his theory on the historical materialism of Marx and Comte, arguing that it is the economic system (what Oliver calls the ‘mode of production’) which is at the heart of a new social explanation of disability. As economic systems vary across space, so do social systems. Oliver’s stated aim is to “show that disability as a category can only be understood within a framework, which suggests that it is culturally and socially produced” (1990, p.22). Oliver named this the ‘social model’ of disability, an idea which rapidly gained credibility and then enthusiasm amongst disabled people and their organisations. Liz Crow puts the ‘revelation’ very well:

“My life had two phases: before the social model, and after it. Discovering this way of thinking about my experiences was the proverbial raft in stormy seas. ... This was the explanation I had sought for years. Suddenly what I had always known, deep down, was confirmed. It wasn’t my body that was responsible for all my difficulties, it was external factors, the barriers constructed by the society in which I live. I was being dis-abled - my capabilities and opportunities were being restricted - by prejudice, discrimination, inaccessible environments and inadequate support. Even more importantly, if all the problems had been created by society, then surely society could un-create them. Revolutionary!” (1996, p.206).

Many disabled people, for the first time, felt that they were no longer to blame for their condition, society had to shoulder a large part of the responsibility. And, by recognising this, things could be different, change was possible. It is important to note here that not all disabled people ascribed to the social model of disability; many still, for

political, employment, medical or personal, reasons, feel that the 'medical' or individual understanding of disability explains their situation and see the social model as little more than the focus for a political campaign.

Whatever people's reservations, the social model did become the focus for a powerful social and political campaign amongst a significant group of disabled people, their organisations and disabled academics such as Oliver, Barnes and Finkelstein. Indeed Oliver, in the final chapter of his 'Politics of disablement' (1990), claims that the only way for disabled people to achieve change is to make their organisations (run by disabled people) into 'new social movements', and to use the social model of disability to fundamentally undermine and overhaul the way that disability is understood and disability policy made. Disabled people took up this call, most notably in the protest surrounding the debate over the call for civil rights for disabled people, which eventually resulted in the passing of the (arguably inferior) Disability Discrimination Act in 1995.

The social model, it has been argued, offers the possibility of a new conceptual framework within which to understand disability (Hughes, 1998). One of its most crucial features is that it allows for change in who is disabled and what disability is. The processes by which people are disabled, 'disablement', can be challenged and changed, and people can reclaim their sense of self, as responsibility is shifted from themselves to society. The medical profession, such an central part of the individual pathology understanding, has also been challenged, both theoretically, in terms of responsibility and approach and practically, in terms of diagnosis, treatment and classification. Moreover, the social model begins to challenge the powerful dualisms which are so central to the dominant conceptualisation. The social model's inherent suspicion of the concepts of 'normality' and 'independence' is allied to its emphasis on social change and process. Such attempted disruption of these dualisms can begin to undermine the hegemonic power of the medical model of disability. Hughes (1998) argues that the models of disability are social constructions, but, importantly, social constructions which have material consequences. I would like to argue that the 'realisation' or 'materialisation' of these social constructions makes it clear that, in the same way that the medical model has

caused problems for many disabled people over the decades, the social model can have very real and positive consequences for disabled people.

3.3.3 *Another challenge - the social model critiqued*

The social model has become the new orthodoxy, if not amongst the Government and the public, then certainly within the disability movement. It has been adopted as the only way of analysing the position of disabled people, as it is the only theory that rejects the individual's impairment and focuses directly on the actions (and inaction) of society. More importantly for the disability movement, it has been understood as the only approach that allows for the possibility of change which does not involve more pain or adaptation by the disabled person.

However, there are a number of problems with the social model. Firstly, as Bury (1996) has commented, there are concerns about the 'politically correct' nature of the social model, developed for ideological reasons by young educated people, which does not deal with the breadth of experiences of disabled people. Secondly, any theory of social construction, by its very nature, must be open to change and contestation. Thirdly, and this connects to the second reason, the social model must evolve if it is to survive and, it has been argued, it must evolve by considering the quality of its explanation of the experiences of disabled people. Fourthly, the social model tends to ignore the impairment part of the disability situation in its quest for a social and political theory.

This final reason is perhaps the most important and has formed the core of the criticism of the social model. Or, to put it more supportively, the increasing call for its re-evaluation. Liz Crow, in her thoughtful critique, states that the social model has changed her life and has contributed to achieving equal rights for disabled people. But then she goes on,

"So how is it that, suddenly to me, for all its strengths and relevance, the social model doesn't seem so water-tight anymore? It is with trepidation that I criticise it. However, when personal experience no longer matches current explanations, then it is time to question afresh" (1996, p.207).

It is Crow's comment about 'personal experience' that is the most telling. Indeed, one of the principal 'architects' of the social model, Mike Oliver, in the midst of a call for a new

understanding of disability, quotes Abberley, who writes, “[the social model approach] does not deny the significance of germs, genes and trauma, but rather points out that their effects are only ever apparent in a real social context” (1987, p.12). So, Oliver recognises that impairment must not be forgotten in the social understanding of disability. However, such selective amnesia has tended to be the case among the disability organisations, particularly in their political campaigns.

It was feminist thinking that first challenged the social model and it is feminist writers who continue to provide the most provocative analyses of the disabled experience. Jenny Morris, Sally French and Liz Crow are three of an increasing number of female disabled academics who have developed the broader feminist thinking of people such as Himmelweit and Crowley (1992) and Kobayashi and Peake (1994). French (1993a) provides a sharp critique of the claimed ‘completeness’ of the social model. In an analysis of Finkelstein’s paper in the same book - in which he argues that if the physical and social world was adapted for wheelchair users, then their disabilities would disappear - French refutes his optimism, “I believe that some of the most profound problems experienced by people with certain impairments are difficult, if not impossible, to solve by social manipulation” (p.17). She uses her experiences as a visually-impaired person to argue that the problems she encounters are not entirely socially-produced, “such problems include my inability to recognise people, being nearly blinded when the sun comes out, and not being able to read non-verbal cues or emit them correctly” (p.17). French recounts that when she discusses these experiences - not concerned solely with visual impairment, for they often involve social interaction, but neither concerned solely with social oppression - with disabled people who are strong advocates of the social model, she is told that her experiences are to do with impairment, not disability, or are due to social factors of the disabling society. Crow, in response to this seeming polarisation of views, calls for a different understanding of *impairment*. She argues that impairment can be ‘reclaimed’ from the medical and individualistic understandings of disability and used, in the words of the title of her piece, to ‘renew the social model of disability’ (1996). She feels that there has been a tendency to exclude the experience of impairment from the social model because it ‘allows’ claims of weakness and bodily determination from the

traditional viewpoint. Put simply, if disabled people start talking about impairment, then people will just say ‘well, we knew all along that disabled people are determined by their bodies’, and the cause of equal rights for disabled people will be severely damaged. But Crow argues that,

“the silence [on impairment] prevents us from dealing effectively with the difficult aspects of impairment. Many of us remain frustrated and disheartened by pain, fatigue, depression and chronic illness, including the way that they prevent us from realising our potential ... yet our silence has made many of these things taboo and created a whole new series of constraints on our self-expression” (1996, p.209-10).

She argues for the social model to be ‘renewed’, so that it “may integrate impairment into our whole experience and sense of ourselves for the sake of our own physical and emotional well-being and, subsequently, for our individual and collective capacity to work against disability” (p.210). In her paper, Crow makes great play of the “reality of disabled people’s daily lives” (p.217). Mike Oliver has responded to the critique of the social model (1996) and made the core of his riposte that the social model was never intended to deal with issues of impairment, rather it’s purpose was that of social change and any connection between disability and impairment would damage this. He quotes Tom Shakespeare,

“The achievement of the disability movement has been to break the link between our bodies and our social situation and to focus on the real cause of disability, i.e. discrimination and prejudice. To mention biology, to admit pain, to confront our impairments, has been to risk the oppressors seizing on evidence that disability is ‘really’ about physical limitation after all” (1992, p.40, quoted in Oliver, 1996, p.39).

Oliver’s suggestion is that a social model of impairment should be developed, “to stand alongside a social model of disability”. However, Oliver’s and Shakespeare’s insistence that impairment and disability must be thought of separately does not effectively answer the critique.

The presence of impairment, of pain, of bodies and biology is something that disability theory has to confront and take on board. Morris perhaps puts this most effectively in her powerful (and accessible) book ‘Pride against prejudice’ (1991). She writes,

“There is a tendency within the social model of disability to deny the experience of our *bodies*, insisting that our physical differences and restrictions are entirely socially created. While environmental and social attitudes are a crucial part of our experience - and do indeed disable us - to suggest that this is all there is to it is to deny the personal experience of physical or intellectual restrictions, of illness, of fear of dying” (p.10, emphasis added).

So, how do we tackle the issue of impairment and the reality of the body? By ‘allowing’ the experiences of people, of their bodies, of their weaknesses, their pain and pleasures, into the interpretation of disability, then perhaps we can effectively renew the social model and make a standpoint that really does reflect the real lives of disabled people. By having this discussion, we can also perhaps begin to break down the boundary around disability and debate more generally, for everyone, the experience of being an imperfect human being. It is important, however, to make the point that this present research is not concerned directly with the issue of the ‘experiences’ of disabled people. Although the above sub-section has used quotations that refer to the importance of ‘personal experiences’ and the necessity to include these in the social model, I would like to argue that the wider issue is that of the body and embodiedness. Morris (1991) argues that there has been a denial of bodies in the social model and I would agree, adding that considering the concept of disability as embodied is a potentially fruitful line of argument. In this argument disability becomes an ongoing process of social and physiological interaction and embeddedness. The experience of disability is certainly included in this possible renewal of the social model, but it is just part of the process of ‘disability’ production and reproduction. The social model changed the lives of many disabled people by recognising that the responsibility for disability lies with society not the individual and by offering the prospect of change. Any renewal of the social model must therefore recognise this achievement and build on the model by ‘filling in the gaps’ so to speak - for instance those of the neglect of impairment and the body - and connecting it ever more closely to the lives of disabled people.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis of how disability is largely understood in British society. In this Conclusion it will be useful to draw out three issues from this

analysis. Firstly, the understandings of disability explained in section 3.2 are deeply embedded in society and represented in many forms of media, images and charity work. The disabled person as a dependent individual, with an 'extreme' abnormal body and a medical categorisation, is still the dominant discourse of disability.

Secondly, if the dominant interpretation of disability has been that based on the individual's situation, reinforced by the categorisations and treatments of the medical profession, it could be argued that the process of 'conceptualising disability' had not started until this dominant understanding was challenged in the late 1970s. Before then, the understanding of disability as an individual problem was simply assumed. The alternative 'social model', which focused the issue of disability on the barriers of society rather than individual limitation, has been important in changing (if only to a limited degree) public attitudes and public policy, including the passing of an anti-discrimination law.

However, and perhaps most significantly, the social model has come under sharp attack for not reflecting the breadth of the embodied lives of disabled people. A new understanding - a different representation and conceptualisation - of disability is called for. The requirements are that it must include and reflect the embodied nature of the lives of disabled people and the important role of society's structures and institutions in this embodiment. It must also deal effectively with the issue of mental and physical impairments and disabilities; an area that is often undertheorised. And lastly, the new approach should begin to explore the possible breakdown of the boundary line between ability and disability. The following chapter, taking its lead from Morris (see above), proposes that our bodies perhaps offer the site for this new understanding of disability.

Chapter Four Disability and the ‘body’

4.1 Introduction

Morris’ (1991) critique of the ‘social model’ of disability focuses on how an over-emphasis on the socially constructed understanding of disability has led to a denial of bodies and the bodily experiences of pain, physical and mental restriction and the fear of death. It was argued that by including bodily experiences (including pain and pleasure, and everyday life) and an overall awareness of the body in the social interpretation of disability - so ‘including all our lives’, as Crow (1996) put it - then perhaps the social model can be renewed. In making this case, neither Morris nor Crow want to dismiss or unravel the social model of disability. They both recognise and celebrate the difference that the social model has made - the shifting of responsibility from individual disabled person to society, the challenging of representations of disabled people, the changes to Government legislation - but contend that it is now time to move on, to develop and improve the social understanding of disability. This ‘next step’, despite the temporary loss of political focus, is a significant one to take.

This chapter will attempt to do three things. Firstly, it will make a case for the inclusion of the body and theories of the body in the interpretation of disability within the social model. There is, understandably given the continuing dominance of the biological explanation of disability, a reluctance to discuss, even a rejection of, theories of the body. The body is seen by many as a return to the individual, biological and medical understandings of disability, which advocates of the social model have for so long fought against (and have, at last, had some success). Morris and Crow suggest that the social model must develop to accurately reflect and explain the lives of disabled people. I want to argue that the theories of the body are a possible way to renew the social model. It is, admittedly, a risky enterprise, as French (1993a) recognises, “I know this is a dangerous line of argument and one which may attract those bent on resisting environmental and social change” (p.21). I contend though, as French does, that it is a necessary risk, “I believe the time has come to broaden and deepen our knowledge, to the benefit of all who define themselves as disabled” (p.24).

The second task of the chapter is to explicate theories of 'the body'. People's bodies have been the subject of study and conceptualisation for many centuries. The connections between the body of a person, group or nation and their personality, attitudes and social actions have been made in literature, art, history and philosophy. In the social sciences there has been a focus on bodily *appearances*, including body building, tattooing and pregnancy and outward *representations* of sexuality, race and disability (see, for example, Goffman's 'The presentation of self in everyday life', 1969) and, at the same time, a conscious ignoring of bodily *processes and actions*. In short, there has been a concern with the surfaces of bodies, rather than with the corporeality of bodies. Here I will argue for a conceptualisation of bodily processes as 'embodiment'. It will be noted that the individual and social understandings of disability are mirrored in the biological and social interpretations of the body and the embodied understanding of disability in the corporeal interpretation of the body. Both biological and social theories of the body have elements which will be useful in the development of an embodied understanding of the body and disability.

The third part of the chapter develops this 'embodied' conceptualisation of disability. This is a relatively new and highly contested notion and so it will be dealt with in detail, revolving around three central points: firstly, that it is important, in this context at least, to use the theories of the body in terms of *embodiment*, that is, the continuous and evolving interactional relationship between people's bodies and their everyday practices, rather than as bodies of representation. Doing this will help us to consider the complexity of disabled people's lives. Secondly, it will be argued that an embodied conceptualisation is inherently a *spatial* one, a crucial factor that the social model did not include. The spaces of the body and the spaces within which the body operates, are an integral part of the way that disability develops both materially and theoretically. And thirdly, the concept of embodiment allows, indeed forces, a concern with issues of disability identity and relatedly the ability and disability dualism. An embodied understanding of disability, of disability as an 'embodied practice' is, I argue, a significant development and renewal of the social model. It is, above all, a development which 'captures' the sense of what disability *is* (and what ability is too).

4.2 The 'body', embodiment and disability

The title of Ruth Pinder's paper 'Bringing back the body without the blame?' (1995) neatly encapsulates the debate around disability and theories of the body. There is increasing pressure for disability and in particular the social model of disability, to be rethought 'through the body'. This section will explore the debate and make the case for an embodied reconceptualisation of disability within the framework of the social model interpretation.

4.2.1 *Bringing back the body without the blame*

It is feminist theorists who have most effectively pushed the case for the inclusion of theories of the body in conceptualising disability. This has, it can be argued, arisen from a dissatisfaction with the explanatory power of the social model and a more overall sense of exclusion from disability theory and the disability movement. Theories of the body and a more general 'sense' of the body have emerged and been developed by disabled feminists as a way to reclaim the debate around disability, to make it more inclusive of all disabled people (men and women) and to reflect and explain the lives of disabled people.

Morris (1991) argues that she faces a double task, to include issues of disability into feminist discussion and to rethink feminist issues through disability theory. The former can possibly be explained by the dominant individual conceptualisation of disability, which has encouraged the feminist movement and theorists not to treat disability as a common experience of discrimination. The latter, Morris argues, is the result of the domination of the disabled people's movement and the body of disabled academics, by men. Feminist theory has gradually begun to incorporate disability into its thinking, partially through the development of bodily theories (e.g. Birke, 1992a) and the work of disabled feminists and others writing on the issue (e.g. Lonsdale, 1990). Disability theory and politics, on the other hand, has resisted feminist ideas, considering that the involvement of another 'social factor' would complicate and even cloud the political influence of the social model of disability. Morris argues that despite the undoubted success of the social model, the domination of the movement and thinking by

men has weakened its theorisation, "Both the movement and the development of a theory of disability have been poorer for this, as there has been an accompanying tendency to avoid confronting the personal experience of disability" (1991, p.9).

Morris uses interviews with eight disabled women to attempt to explain her reinterpretation of disability as a bodily experience. One woman she talked to, who has a severe visual impairment, said that because of the pressure that society applies to people to have a 'perfect', healthy body she has spent most of her life, "as if I weren't blind".

Now she recognises that she has restrictions which she can't and doesn't want to, deny,

"I realised that when I was younger I was refusing to look after myself in the way that I needed to because I was saying that being blind didn't make any difference to me. I spent a while getting very angry with growing old and hating it. Now I feel more friendly towards my body and feel that I want to look after it by recognising that I'm slowing down, that I can't do as much as I used to. But I feel good about this because I feel I'm more in touch with the real me" (quoted on p.183).

Morris argues that such experience of ageing and physical limitation is part of the experience of living and so must be included in a theorisation of disability. She in fact goes further, arguing that if this development is not achieved, if the experiences of our bodies and our embodiment are not included in the social model of disability, then we will "collaborate in our oppression" (p.183).

French (1993b) recounts her experience as a visually-impaired child. Her parents, teachers, friends and opticians all wanted to believe that her impairment was unimportant and negligible, which French explains, "led me along the path of denial" (p.69). But, crucially, she argues that this was not 'denial' in the psychological sense of the word often used to describe disabled people's reaction to their impairment, but "a sensible and rational response to the peculiar situation I was in" (p.70). Her experience at a 'special school' developed the sense of denial, with the teachers encouraging the visually-impaired students to think of themselves as sighted, to visit the local town without a white cane and to achieve in 'visual' subjects such as art and design. French summarises the effect on her,

"In many ways [the teachers'] attitudes and behaviour were refreshing, yet they placed the onus to achieve and succeed entirely on ourselves; there was never any suggestion that the world could adapt, or that our needs could or should be

accommodated. The underlying message was always the same: 'Be superhuman and deny your disability'" (p.73).

What French is saying is quite complex: she is certainly challenging the way she was treated as a child and at special school, particularly the individualising of the responsibility for the impairment. Indeed, this is the very kind of situation the social model was developed to tackle, shifting the blame from individual to society. But she is also arguing that the real effects of her impairment were not accounted for, that she had to work hard to 'cover up' the difficulties and experiences of being blind. Her experiences at college develop the argument. She describes a statistics course she attended,

"I could see absolutely nothing of what was going on in the lectures and yet my frequent and articulate requests for help were met with the response that all students panic about statistics and that everything would work out fine in the end ... As people are generally not too concerned about how we 'got there', our successes serve to reinforce the erroneous assumption that we really are 'just like everybody else'" (p.74).

Again there was a denial of French's impairment and this worked out in practice in a failure to recognise the different learning issues that she had, resulting in extra, private tuition to achieve the results. This failure to recognise the different needs of students, with colleges only interested in results, reveals a focus on the *outcome*, rather than on the *process*. The Introduction emphasised that the approach to disabled people in flexible employment will focus on the process of employment, i.e. what actually happens in work, between the person and their job.

It is the recognition by French of the 'real' consequences of physical and mental states of people that opens up the disability discussion to theories of the body. Physical and mental conditions and impairments *do* make a difference to the methods used by people to achieve something and do in some cases restrict the amount and type of tasks that can be done. Claiming that this is not true, or that all of the restrictions are due to socially-constructed barriers, cannot be sustained and can actually damage the cause of disabled people, "We deny our disabilities for social, economic and emotional survival, and we do so at considerable cost to our sense of self and our identities" (French, 1993b, p.77). Just as importantly, however, French's recognition of the importance of process and practice in the development of disability enables us to involve the body theory in a

more complex and potentially more useful way. Rather than thinking of the body as a entity which has an effect, we can perhaps think of the body as a process or practice, as an ongoing, continual set of interactions between a person and their life, and all its events and situations. What this does, crucially in light of the criticisms of the involvement of body theory in disability thinking, is to introduce a strong social element into the discussion around the body. The 'body' is often automatically conceived as a purely physical and biological entity, so leading to conclusions of biological determinism, an explanation that has, for so long, been associated with disability. Conceptualising the body as social, yet still a physical and mental reality, is what is argued here.

Pinder (1995) argues that the situation of disabled people in employment cannot be understood "without bringing the individual - and the body - back into the equation as a topic for investigation" (p.607). It is her conceptualisation of the body as a 'set of relations', as the 'place' where we experience our lives, that is extremely useful in our present discussion. It leads her to argue that disability is a 'mutually constituted' entity that involves both the physicality of the person and the environmental barriers in society. Just as important, however, was the reaction to Pinder's paper. Her argument includes strong criticism of the way that the social model of disability has been used by the disability movement, a criticism she claims was shared by the disabled people she interviewed.

Shakespeare, amongst others, was quick to respond to Pinder, claiming that her attack on the disability movement was unjustified, but more importantly for the present argument, that even discussing incorporating concepts of the body and biology into the understanding of disability was dangerous and unacceptable (1995). Since then Shakespeare (with Watson) has modified his argument (1995), and now argues that sociology has largely ignored disability, or treated it as a purely social and cultural phenomenon. He also concedes, in an indirect way, that what the disabled people's political movement has contributed is "conceptual notions of the disabling environment and the social model" (p.6), and not a conceptual theory of the experience of disabled people, something that "sociologists of the body are guilty of neglecting" (p.6).

Theories of the body, it seems, are now part of the debate around disability, if not at the heart of the discussion. To proceed we have to consider what the body actually *means* in relation to disability.

4.2.2 *The body, biology and impairment*

If we are to think and speak of the body - its physical and mental processes - in relation to disability, then consideration must be made of the physicality of the disabled body and of *impairment* itself.

One of the central debates around disability has been the relationship between disability and impairment, an issue raised in the Introduction. A major achievement of the political and academic disability campaigns was the challenge to the causal relationship between impairment and disability. In other words, the physical or mental condition of the person, it was argued, did not result in the disability of the person, the disability instead was produced by a discriminatory society. The clear separation between the physical and mental state of the person and their experience in society, was a significant conceptual change which had many positive outcomes for disabled people, both politically and personally. This separation of impairment and disability, of the biological and the social, has too been an integral part of the debates around gender and race. A rejection of biology and biological determinism has made a significant contribution to the liberation of, and opportunities for, women and black people. The 'freeing' of women and black people from their supposedly biologically-produced 'nature' and hence inferior social position, is a process and an achievement that most would not even contemplate questioning let alone reject. Cockburn (1991) recognises this,

"Once feminists admit the mildest degree of sexual difference they open up a gap through which the currents of reaction will flow. Once let slip that pre-menstrual tension interfered with concentration, that pregnancy can be exhausting, that motherhood is absorbing, and you are off down the slope to separate spheres" (p.161).

To talk of biology and of its effects on the social experience of a person, will inevitably mean a return to the assumptions and theories of determinism and the gains of many decades of political and personal campaigning may be lost.

Significantly, as has been noted above, it has been feminist writers who have begun to question this rejection of biology and the clear-cut separation between physicality and socially constructed identity. Morris (1991) and French (1993a) both question the exclusion of biology from the conceptualisation of disability in the social model. Crow (1996) has added to this discussion with a fascinating account of impairment as the 'biology' of disability, in much the same way as sex has been identified as the 'biology' of gender. Crow argues that impairment must be taken seriously as an integral part of an understanding of disability. She claims that the exclusion of impairment from the debate denies the opportunity for many disabled people to discuss the realities of physical and mental limitations, "Many of us remain frustrated and disheartened by pain, fatigue, depression and chronic illness, including the way they prevent us realising our potential or railing against disability (our experience of exclusion and discrimination)" (p.209). She argues that the pretence that impairments are irrelevant does not mean that the physical or mental processes do not exist and on a broader scale this "silencing undermines individuals ability to 'cope' and, ultimately, the whole disabled people's movement" (p.210).

There is a personal and a political necessity to integrate impairment into the conceptualisation of disability and into the understanding of the material reality of disabled people's lives. The question is how to include impairment in the debate without slipping back into the individual model of disability, or providing ammunition for those who wish to argue that disability is the result of impaired bodies. Crow argues that a possible way through this is to consider impairment not as a physical or mental imperfection, but as a social construction of a particular physicality *as* damaged or imperfect. She proposes a reinterpretation of impairment as 'personal' which,

"incorporates any meaning that impairment holds for an individual (i.e. any effects it has on their activities), the feelings it produces (e.g. pain) and any concerns the individual might have (e.g. how their impairment might progress). Individuals might regard their impairment as positive, neutral or negative and this might differ according to the time and changing circumstances" (p.210).

So impairment can be thought of in three related ways. Firstly, as a physical and/or mental bodily or biological state; secondly, as an individual experience of this state; and thirdly, as the social context of the impairment. The third aspect is the

construction of disability from the social and environmental barriers to people with impairments. This is the issue that the social model identifies and which the disabled people's movement acts against. However, all three aspects of impairment are essential to an understanding of disability. There *is* a relationship between impairment and disability, but we do not have to think of this as a simple relationship, but rather as a 'rounded' relationship, i.e. both impairment and disability are part of the life experience of disabled people.

It is, however, important to extend this discussion. I would like to argue that a significant addition can be made to the rethinking of impairment, disability and the body. Crow's discussion on impairment, focused on the physical and mental *limitations* of impairment (or the physicality of the person). To fully integrate impairment into the discussion on disability we must consider the full range of physical and mental states and experiences, certainly pain and fatigue, but also pleasure and satisfaction and, just as importantly, ordinary everyday physical and mental actions and events. This will be a significant reclaiming of the concept of impairment from its construction as the inferior body. More crucially, however, is that this allows us to push the discussion around the body and disability further, to think of the disabled body not just as a discriminated against impaired body, but as a multi-faceted, 'complete' body that is involved in a myriad of social and cultural relationships. This is an attempt to push the debate around disability and the body beyond the discussion of the representation of the impaired 'imperfect' body or the recognition of the damaged physicality of the impaired body in the social model. Both these issues are important and certainly part of the conceptualisation of disability and the body. But what I want to address is the 'whole' sense of the person and the body, all aspects of people's lives, so impairment is just one part of the experience of a person classified as disabled. The way I propose to do this is through thinking, as I argued above, of the process of the body, its actions and interactions, its effects and changes. In other words, thinking through an *embodied* sense of the body.

4.2.3 *Reclaiming the body - 'embodiment'*

In a clever tale, Finkelstein (1981b) argues that the social explanation of disability is all. He tells the story of a world - physical and mental - that is designed specifically for wheelchair users, with doors widened, ceilings lowered, desks and kitchen work surfaces at a different height. In this world the disabilities of wheelchair users would disappear and at the same time formerly able-bodied people would become disabled. The impairment - in this case lower body paralysis - would still remain, but this would be for the individual to deal with and no problems or disadvantage would come from it. This is a powerful argument, in particular its separation of any causal connection between impairment and disability, and the possibility of change.

However, as has been argued above, impairment and disability cannot be so easily separated as they have a strong interactional relationship. French explains this in the following way,

“While I agree with the basic tenets of [the social] model and consider it to be the most important way forward for disabled people, I believe that some of the most profound problems experienced by people with certain impairments are difficult, if not impossible, to solve by social manipulation ... Various profound social problems that I encounter as a visually-impaired person, which impinge upon my life far more than indecipherable notices or the lack of bleeper crossings, are more difficult to regard as entirely socially produced or amenable to social action. Such problems include my inability to recognise people, being nearly blinded when the sun comes out, and not being able to read non-verbal clues or emit them correctly” (1993a, p.17).

She is not saying that impairment is purely individual and disability is purely social - *both* elements are social and physiological concepts, both constructed and real, both collective and individual. So, people with impairments who experience change and removal of obvious disability do not stop being disadvantaged and those whose impairment ceases can continue to experience disability. Additionally, people can be disabled even if they have no impairment, by reputation or medical screening (Crow, 1996). Disability and impairment *interact* in a complex and ever changing way, affected by many collective and individual, social and biological factors.

French describes this complex situation using her experiences of lecturing in a college. Her difficulty in reading non-verbal clues *is* an issue,

“It is true that to some extent non-verbal communication can be replaced by verbal communication, but in reality the subtleties of non-verbal communication are difficult (perhaps impossible) to replace; a student may look bored, or interested, but is unlikely to verbalise such feelings. One social solution to these difficulties would be for me to give up teaching large groups of students altogether, or to have a sighted colleague with me all the time; all in all, however, the lectures were successful, the students were satisfied, I was sufficiently familiar with the situation to cope with it and in many ways the problem, though far from trivial, was insufficiently serious to warrant any drastic action. The situation I have described is not concerned solely with visual impairment, for it involves social interaction, but neither is it born of social oppression” (1993a, p.19).

French elsewhere describes this as a ‘middle ground’. I would argue that French’s experience of this ‘middle ground’ of impairment and disability within a social and bodily world, is the reality of everyday life for most disabled people. This is not to deny the significant oppression that disabled people experience, the massive changes that can be made with the removal of social and physical barriers, nor that the social model *did* connect to disabled people’s experiences (see Oliver, 1996). It does imply, however, that to develop the social model of disability to more accurately reflect the complexity of disabled people’s lives and to include the whole range of disabled people, impairment and disability must be worked in together. As Crow argues,

“Integrating [impairment] into our use of the social model is vital if we are to understand fully the ways that disability and impairment operate. What a renewed social model of disability does is broaden and strengthen the current social model, taking it beyond grounded theory and into real life, because it allows us to incorporate a holistic understanding of our experiences and the potential for change” (1996, p.223).

4.3 Conceptualising the body and disability: biological, social and corporeal

There is a need at this point to take a step back and consider the concepts of the ‘body’ and ‘embodiment’ in more detail. What, for example, do we mean by a ‘body’? How has the theory of the body developed? How has the body been represented, interpreted and understood? What possible ways are there for understanding and analysing the body? This section will consider these questions and how they relate to the understanding of disability.

4.3.1 *Bodies*

Sennett in 'Flesh and stone' (1994) argues that Western society has always had 'trouble with the body', particularly in "honouring the dignity of the body and the diversity of human bodies" (p.15). He finds this difficult to understand because modern Western societies have had the body at the centre of many issues and debates. A possible way of approaching this, he continues, is the division that has developed between the privileged (and often idealised) representations of the human body and the largely ignored reality of the body. Sennett offers a personal story as an example. He went to see a violent war film with a friend who had lost a hand during the Vietnam conflict. After the film, as the two men stood outside the cinema, Sennett describes how,

"my friend lit a cigarette, slowly; he then held up the cigarette in his [metal] claw [hand] to his lips steadily, almost proudly. The movie patrons had just sat through two hours of bodies being blasted and ripped apart, the audiences applauding particularly good hits and otherwise thoroughly enjoying the gore. People streamed out around us, glanced uneasily at the prosthesis, and moved away; soon we were an island in their midst" (p.16).

Despite the constant challenge of pain and all elements of bodily experience in Western society, Sennett argues, we have refused to 'naturalise' suffering, instead either trying to control it socially or medically. This displays an inherent lack of knowledge of the body, showing that we are 'out of touch' with, or desensitised to, our bodies. He argues that a lack of knowledge of the body and a non-acceptance of weakness and pain and, I would add, strength and pleasure, indeed all experiences, has led us to think of society and bodies as whole and complete, rather than as partial, complex and different. Sennett sees the consequence of this as, "We will never experience the difference of others until we acknowledge the bodily insufficiencies in ourselves" (p.370).

It is this contradictory nature of bodily conceptualisation that dominates social theories of the body, i.e. an acceptance that the body exists, but a lack of critical engagement with the often simplistic or surface sense of its existence. Shilling (1993) describes this as a 'paradox' in the study of the body and the body as an 'absent presence' in sociology. He explains this as follows,

"The body has been absent from sociology in the sense that the discipline has rarely focused on the body as an area of investigation in its own right ... however,

its concern with the structure and functioning of societies has inevitably led it to deal with aspects of human *embodiment*” (p.9, original emphasis).

For example, studies of health, education, racism, the underclass - all major social issues and the subject of sociological analysis - are all, inherently ‘bodily’ practices - the health of bodies, the disciplining of bodies, the negative representation of bodies, the status of bodies - but rarely is the body explicitly engaged with when looking at these issues. Shilling traces this paradoxical approach to the body back to the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology, such as Durkheim, Weber and Marx, who, he argues, in an attempt to analyse social change, conceptualised the body as pre-social or ‘natural’ and, adding to this, privileged the mind over the body as the setting for human agency, “The body was considered as a passive container which acted as a shell to the active mind” (p.26). We can look further back, to Grecian times, and see how the body was understood not only as separate from the mind, but also as a site of possible corruption of the human spirit and of society as a whole. Most notably, the philosopher Plato described the body as alien - ‘it is fastened and glued to me’; as confinement and limitation - ‘a prison’; as an enemy - ‘a source of countless distractions ... it is full of loves, lusts and fears and fancies of all kinds ... and takes away from us the power of thinking’; and as a threat to our control as it overtakes, overwhelms, and erupts and disrupts - ‘nature orders the soul to rule and govern the body to obey and serve’ (Shilling, 1993).

This philosophical understanding, in particular the unequal relationship between mind and body, became fixed as the dominant Western hegemony by the work of Descartes in the seventeenth century. His central concept, ‘I think therefore I am’, was the basis for a simple, yet incredibly strong and dominant, understanding of the body and, by extension, of all relations in society. The Cartesian philosophy had at its centre a clear division between mind and body. However, more important was the nature of the relationship between the two - the mind as dominant over the body, the mind as important and the body as not. The mind achieves its meaning as much by *not* being the body, as it does by being the mind (and vice versa). What became known as the ‘binary’ or ‘dualistic interactionism’ developed into a positivistic interpretation of society as pairs of binary relations, male and female, young and old, white and black, sane and mad, culture and nature and so on. All the pairs are connected by a power relation, with one dominant and

the other subordinate, and both needing the other to be defined. Crucially for this discussion, all of the pairs are rooted in the original mind-body dualism, with the mind as rational and logical and the body as irrational and illogical. So the mind and rationality were associated with maleness, youth, whiteness, sanity and culture, and the body and irrationality with femaleness, old age, blackness, madness and nature. Cartesian philosophy ordered the world, creating a series of clear relationships, with everyone in the right place and aware of the 'Other' which maintained them in that position.

The Cartesian framework also has at its centre the notion of the person as *individual*. A person is a part of wider society, but their fortunes and experiences are entirely their own responsibility and making and, further, their bodies are theirs to use and abuse as they decide (Turner, 1996).

It is these two features of bodily theorising - the *binary* of mind and body and the *individualistic* nature of a person's relationship with their body - which, I argue, lie at the heart of traditional thinking about the body and which are central to the way that *disability* is conceptualised, i.e. as a subordinate relation to ability in an ability-disability dualism, as an irrational, negative, natural phenomenon and as an individual experience and responsibility for the person so affected.

Both Shilling (1993) and Turner (1996) have argued that as the modern theories of society have been challenged by the postmodern and poststructuralist theories of the 1980s and 1990s, so a crucial critique of Cartesian thought has emerged. Postmodernism's scepticism of the overarching theories or grand narratives of modernism has involved a fundamental questioning of the binary relationships that are at the heart of the Cartesian interpretation of the world. The strict divisions between nature and culture, male and female, black and white and, just as importantly, the power relations that hold them in place, are being rethought as more fluid, open relationships, where who and what we are is less certain, less rational and ever changing. This has included the beginning of a questioning of the ability-disability dualism, the dualism of the individual and society and the fundamental division between mind and body. Once such a questioning has emerged and the body is no longer seen simply as the subordinate partner in a strict power relationship with the mind, then the body has to be taken seriously in its own right.

Importantly, though, it is not only the physical body being taken seriously, but the very relation between body and mind and the developing notion of the 'body' as encompassing mind *and* (physical) body. In this sense the 'body' is more than material and the relationship between construction and materiality is blurred, as both processes are involved in the 'making' of the body.

These developments have occurred at the same time as a significant rise in popular interest in the body. Images of the body feature heavily in newspapers, magazines, advertising and television, while body fitness, health, diet, plastic surgery and the denial of the ageing process, have made the body an important 'project' for many people and, more importantly, understood as an integral part of a sense of self-identity (Shilling, 1993). Features of the body - such as sexual display and activity, fashion, and body adornment - have also become part of 1990s popular culture. Academic study has become fascinated with these aspects of the body, particularly around sex and sexuality (e.g. Segal, 1997), body building (Rosen, 1983) and anorexia (Benson, 1997). The body has been conceptualised as a surface, an image, a representation, a metaphor, and in terms of desire, body worship and body project (Turner, 1996). The insides of the body, the actions of the body and the processes of the body, have largely been passed by or, understood as biology, left to the study of medical sociologists. It seems to be an issue of social theory not wanting to get its hands dirty, avoiding the 'messiness' of the processes of the human body. I want to argue that the bringing in of the materiality or reality of the body will make a 'real' difference to the social theory of the body.

Longhurst (1995) suggests that a "historical privileging of the purely conceptual over the corporeal is one of the presumptions that underlies the production of geographical knowledge" (p.97). Her call for geographers to move onto the 'fertile ground' of the literature on the body is part of a wider appeal to problematise the mind-body split and to challenge dualistic theorising and universalist claims of knowledge. She claims that the body has been treated as geography's 'Other'. Rather than being simply absent from geographical inquiry, the body has been denied and rejected. When the body has featured it has been chiefly as a site of inscription or marking or constructed (e.g. Cream, 1994; McDowell, 1993), with no sense of the body as embodied or linked to the

challenge of dualisms of sex and gender, of male and female and of mind and body. The body has been taken more seriously recently in the area of 'sexed' bodies. Rose (1993) has argued that there is an explicit 'sexualisation' of knowledge and how taking this on board is a way to undermine dominant (masculine) discourses. Bondi (1992) and McDowell (1993) have noted the sexed nature of city spaces, and Bell and Valentine (1995) on sexuality and desire and Jackson (1994) on the 'black body', have brought the body into geographical thinking.

There has, since these initial offerings, been an explosion of interest and a flurry of articles on the body in geographical literature. The body is finally being taken seriously within geography. However, there are two criteria, I argue, by which any work on the body should be judged: firstly, is the 'real', material body being studied, not simply the surfaces and representations of the body? And secondly, is the body being studied in terms of its actions and interactions, i.e. is it more than just the flesh that is involved in the process? A small number of geographers have begun to make moves that could fulfil these criteria. Pile and Thrift (1995), for instance, have developed a sense of the body as the 'home' of the subject, of who a person is. The body here is not simply biological or social, but 'socialised' and corporeal, the 'repository' of a person, a 'point of capture' where power relations, social events and biological processes are collected, worked upon and fed back into the world. Pile and Thrift add to Haraway's notion of the body as 'a map of meaning and power' (1990), by arguing that the body is a location and a space where the person is made and becomes who they are. If we see the body as a spatial entity then this allows us to conceptualise it as having both depth and width, being a place where things can happen and be located and where different processes and elements can come together. In a similar vein, Butler and Bowlby (1997) make the vital connection between disability, the body and space. In a study of the use of public space by people with visual impairments, they argue that for the interviewees, their bodies, including their appearance, their ability to negotiate physical space and their self-preservation, were all of central importance in their social experience of space.

4.3.2 *The biological body*

The discussion above has made it clear that biological or natural interpretations and representations have dominated the understanding of the body for several centuries. The biological understanding of the body has three key features: firstly, the body is pre-social and so is a fixed entity, unaffected by social processes; secondly, the body defines a person, or more precisely, an individual and their experiences and fortunes in life; and thirdly, the body is the foundation upon which society is built.

Shilling (1993) argues that the biological view of the body emerged at a particular moment in history, in the eighteenth century. Prior to this, although people's bodies were used to determine, for example, their sex, there was no biological link made between the body and this characteristic. It was when science began to gain confidence and social and cultural importance that the elements of the body itself began to be linked to the person. The anatomy and physiology of people's bodies began to be studied and categorised; in terms of the example of sex, the male and female identities were linked to particular physical characteristics and processes. The third of our key features - the body as a basis for society - became more certain at this time.

The particular focus was on the biology of women's bodies, unsurprising given the domination of science by men, but more significantly because of the subordinate position of women in the male-female dichotomy and the association of women with the body (both seen to be 'natural' phenomena). The key point was that women and their lives were ruled by their bodies, which at the same time were weak. This weakness further explained their secondary social position. What was created was a self-fulfilling prophecy: women were in a poor social position, this was explained by their bodies and as a result they were not offered opportunities to gain better positions because they were ruled by these weak bodies. Certain female bodily processes, particularly menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, were the focus of intense study. Bodies defined women as female and, at the same time, explained the behaviour and position of women (Richardson, 1991; Shilling, 1993). Men's bodies, on the other hand, were hardly considered. They were 'known' to be different from women's bodies, but mostly because (in the classic binary sense) they were understood as 'normal'. Men's bodies were

certainly biological, but not marked by biological process. Understandings of women being ruled by their bodies, bodies that are weak, unruly and controlled by hormonal change, continue today. Women are still denied certain jobs and roles because of this (Kaplan and Rogers, 1990).

Race is another area where biological make-up has been understood to determine a person's personality and behaviour. Jordan (1982) has argued that, like women, black people have been associated with the body (while white people are associated with the mind) and, as was argued above, with nature and a subordinate position in society, "White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the Devil" (p.44). This was an important part of slavery and colonisation, the oppression of black people, issues of immigration and the continued racism which is a feature of all Western societies. Black people were seen as *being* their biological bodies and such an understanding legitimated the treatment, exploitation and abuse of black people as they were somehow reduced to their (mindless) bodies. This discussion is also reflected in the debate around disability in the previous sub-section. Disabled people were seen as defined by their bodies, distinguished biologically from able-bodied people and their (inferior) social position determined by their bodies.

The biologically deterministic understanding of bodies has been significantly developed by the explosion of genetic theory. The biological connection has been 'deepened' and, the geneticists would argue, made more certain by these developments. As a result, the causal link between biology and society has become at the same time both more certain and more stretched. As well as every aspect of the body being genetically 'mapped', there has been a whole series of studies which have claimed to identify certain genes with certain physical states. The genes for the colour of hair, the pigmentation of the skin and certain impairments, such as cerebral palsy and Down's syndrome have been searched for and identified (e.g. *Daily Telegraph*, 1997; *The Guardian*, 1997f; *Daily Mail*, 1996). More significantly in terms of our present discussion, genes have been identified with certain aspects of social behaviour, such as aggression, homosexuality and criminal behaviour (e.g. *The Guardian*, 1996b; *The Guardian*, 1995b; *The Independent*, 1995).

That a single gene can be responsible for such a complex matter as social behaviour may seem ludicrous, but it is both claimed and widely accepted in present Western society. There are, of course, enormous implications of this new strand of scientific thought. Firstly, that people are directly determined by their genetic make-up, or even by a single gene, which is deep inside the body and so is fixed and cannot change. Secondly, and as a consequence, people can do nothing about the actions of their genes; we are, as Dawkins (1976) argues, dominated by our genes, prisoners of their will. Connell (1987) has argued that such theorising is 'pseudo-biology', as it makes connections between biological conditions and social processes that a scientist would not make. It seems that public and cultural demands for explanations has drawn these conclusions out of scientific research; there is no real scientific claim that a gene can determine social behaviour. Genes and genetics are clearly not the entire picture or story of the body, producing, as I see it, a far too clear-cut version of what bodies mean (see Rose, 1997). Shakespeare has argued in several articles (e.g. *The Guardian*, 1997e) that genetic investigation, such as the huge 'Human Genome Project' (to 'map' the entire genetic make-up of the human body) is both highly dangerous and potentially productive. It provides ammunition to those who wish to argue the case for biological determinism, which is particularly significant, he argues, in relation to disabled people, as genes have been isolated for certain impairments and there are huge implications from this in respect of genetic screening for employment (*The Observer*, 1996) and screening for foetal 'abnormalities'. At the same time the identification of genes has shown that all humans, on average, contain about five mutated recessive (i.e. not active) genes which could result in impaired children (Shakespeare and Watson, 1995).

Bodies are 'messier' entities than a string of DNA and there are more combinations of hormones, fluids and movements than a gene can account for. Such a 'messy' view of biology allows us to think about the way that biology cannot define people so easily as, for example, male and female, for there is so much more to being female and male than the presence of the XY and XX chromosomes (Birke, 1992b) and in many cases there is no guarantee that a certain genetic code will result in a particular physical entity (Kaplan and Rogers, 1990).

An important alternative interpretation of the body has emerged from the work of feminists. Barrett (1987) and Jaggar (1984) use the biological determinist argument to claim that women's biology gives them a strength and uniqueness that male bodies cannot match. Barrett argues that the female body is a powerful, natural phenomenon and women as a result are inherently powerful, their poor social position being a situation to fight against. Jaggar adds to this when she argues that women have natural superiority over men, which stems from their biology and in particular their ability to reproduce. Similar arguments have been put forward in relation to race, best illustrated by the 'black power' movement of the 1970s. This is not a completely negative set of views. For one, it is challenging on its own ground the claim that men's bodies and therefore men are dominant. Secondly, it is treating biology positively, accepting that it has a role to play in the development and experience of people. Such a stance has been an important part of the disability political movement, with its strong themes of 'disability pride', including the celebration of disabled bodies, the reclaiming of such negative terms as 'cripple' and the insistence by many disabled people to stress the 'disability' in their identity (rather than it coming second, as in the term 'people with disabilities').

4.3.3 *The social body*

It is a good indicator of the path that social theory has taken that much of the above discussion on biology and the body is now dismissed as incorrect and even dangerous. As Shakespeare and Watson state, "the mention of biology and physiology has traditionally sent shivers down the progressive spines of the sociological world" (1995, p.1). The body has never been in the forefront of sociological thinking and when the body has been studied its biology has been studiously avoided. For most social theory biology has no impact on a person's personality or social position, which is considered to be moulded by the processes of society. In turn, the body is considered to be socially constructed, not biologically determined. In disability studies the social understanding of the disabled body has only recently emerged and is still a minority view. Social constructionist ideas can, this sub-section will argue, add a great deal to the understanding of the body and disability.

Theories of social constructionism treat the body as a serious topic of study, but they also provide a focus on how social processes and roles affect the body. Several key social theorists have considered the body and taken its existence seriously. Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman have all offered detailed and complex social analyses of the body as a social being.

Douglas has, in her two central texts, 'Purity and danger' (1966) and 'Natural symbols' (1970), developed an anthropological theory of the body. She conceptualises the body as a site of symbolic meaning in society, that is, the body as an image or reflection of society, or society 'writ small'. Consequently, although the body is a physical entity, its meaning and hence its role, is determined by the context and processes of society. Douglas uses the example of left and right handedness (1966): in some societies, particularly in the West, the right hand is considered 'good' and the left hand 'bad'. Further, connections are made between the value of the hands and the characteristics of the person; often the 'weak' and 'bad' left hand has represented the female and the 'strong' and 'good' right hand, the male. Such connections between individuals, their bodies and society, have made the body central to social processes; this is an important recognition. Additionally, an anthropological approach to the body can be useful because it forces one to consider the power of the particular social context and how this is different in different cultures. So, if the body is a social being then it must be understood differently in different social contexts.

It is Foucault, however, who has provided the most significant sociological contribution to the understanding of the body as a social entity. Put simply, for Foucault 'discourse' is what makes up the body, i.e. the body is the product of particular social practices and networks of meaning. There is no inclusion of biological processes in the approach of Foucault. However, although Foucault does not include the biology of the body in his analysis, discourse, because it becomes material, must work through biological processes.

Foucault's work is wide-ranging, with major works on mental health, prison regimes and the 'government' of people, sexuality and knowledge. However, McNay (1994) argues that there are perhaps two major themes in his work, *power* and *the subject*.

Foucault understood power not in terms of the orthodox institutions of power such as the state, but rather how power *relations* are the stuff that holds social practices together and which create divisions and oppression in society. In 'The birth of the clinic' (1973), Foucault showed how the practices of psychology and psychiatry were used to repress people with mental illness and to classify them as 'mad'. This negative conception of power relations was again evident in Foucault's classic study of prison regimes, 'Discipline and punish' (1977). Later, however, he reconceptualised power in a more even-handed and social way and, most crucially, as the underlying feature of all social relations.

Foucault also criticised the traditional understanding of the 'self' as a unified and rational *subject*. In the study of mental illness regimes he noted how the mad 'other' ('other', that is, to the 'sane' subject) was in no way 'natural', but specifically created by the practices of the clinic. Later he developed the *discursive* approach (1974) which understood the subject as the product or construction of social relations and processes. For Foucault there is no pre-social, pre-discursive, biological self, only the one created by society. Significantly, in relation to the overall argument of this chapter, Foucault, in another theoretical development, shifted the focus of a person from the 'subject' to the 'body' (McNay, 1994). In the three volume 'The history of sexuality' (1981, 1986, 1988) Foucault's 'docile bodies' of his work in 'Discipline and punish' (1977) become 'active agents', with "the capacity to autonomously fashion their own existences" (McNay, 1994, p.7). But, the power of the social remains: in 'The history of sexuality, volume 1' (1981) he insists that there is no such thing as essential human nature, only a socially-produced body. In reference to sexuality, he argues that sexuality is not a natural fact of the body, but a product of historically-specific regimes of power of normalisation acting on the body.

The three key elements of Foucault's theoretical framework, discourse, power and the subject, have a significant contribution to make to conceptualising the body and disability. Firstly, the body can be seen as a centre of social relations, the focus of discursive practices and the link between everyday practices and the larger scale structures of power (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). Shilling (1993) argues that in his study

of the prison system (1977), Foucault showed how the bodies of inmates were managed, they were seen as key to the regime of power. The 'Panoptican' watchtower surveyed people's bodies as an essential part of the management of bodies. However, even though the body was the focus of these processes, the body was understood as a passive surface for the inscription of social meaning. The true sense of the person was in the *mind* and this was the object of discursive practices. And, despite his focus on social context, Foucault's sense of the body is one of an *individual* entity, not a social body in the sense of a body as a social product.

Secondly, Foucault's discursive approach rejects the biology of bodies as having importance. Shilling has even argued that this makes the body 'disappear' as a biological or material entity (1993). While this can lead one to consider Foucault's work as 'disembodied', it does allow an effective challenge to biological determinism to be developed. In terms of the dominant understandings of the body and disability, this is of major significance to the social model of disability and to the deconstruction of orthodox views and offers the possibility of change.

Thirdly, his 'historical' approach to the social construction of the body, allows one to see how the body and disability have been created in different social periods and in different cultural contexts. His study of the 'creation' of the 'mad' identity and the recognition given to the 'other' in the dualist relationship, allows an understanding of identity formation and oppression to be developed.

Fourthly, the power relations that are essential to Foucault's theory tie people's bodies into particular contexts, relations and identities. This is important because it challenges some of the more excessive interpretations of social constructionism that see the subject and the body as 'free floating', capable of aligning and attaching themselves to any identity location. Recognising that all social processes and subjects operate through sets of power relations does not deny that they can be challenged, but rather it acknowledges that structures are involved in social practices.

Goffman is the third of the selected social theorists to have considered the body as a social being. His work - notably 'Stigma' (1963) and 'The presentation of self in

everyday life' (1969) - has always been viewed with suspicion by many disabled academics. Written at the height of the institutional care of disabled people, the studies present an individual approach to disability, one that emphasises the damaged nature of the impaired body and the responsibility of the disabled person to 'manage' their appearance and behaviour. However, there are useful elements in Goffman's work. Firstly, echoing Foucault, Goffman rejects a biologically-determined understanding of the body. But, crucial to the argument of this chapter, he takes the body seriously, not rejecting it quite as swiftly as Foucault did. Shilling argues that Goffman sees the body as "integral to human agency" and as something which "enables people to intervene in, and make a difference to, the flow of daily life" (Shilling, 1993, p.2). Secondly, Goffman considers, in a similar way to Foucault, the body to be the 'link' between an individual and their identity *and* the broader social understanding of the person. The placing of the body at the centre of social relations is of vital importance to the overall argument. Thirdly, this bodily linking between an individual and society is based on a theory of *interactionism*, on the continuous series of interactions between a person and their social and environmental context. I have argued above that such a set of interactions, or the *process* of social relations, is a potentially useful way to conceptualise the body and disability. What Goffman adds to this discussion is that people don't enter innocently into these interactions, there are 'rules' and codes of appearance and behaviour and expectations of reactions, all of which are imbued with power relations (1969). Goffman's conclusions on this are mostly negative, particularly the notions of 'spoiled identity' and 'stigma'.

Despite Goffman's reductionist and individualist view of disabled people, based largely on the limitations of the 'spoiled' individual and their attempts to be 'accepted' by society, his work on interactionism is potentially useful to a study of the body and disability, as it focuses on the centrality of the body to everyday social relations.

All three theorists discussed in this sub-section have a fundamental common theme, i.e. the body is determined or constructed or produced, by processes *outside* its bounds, in society. And further, the body, although produced by social processes, is of

little interest in itself - it is representation, it is meaning and symbolism, that matters in the social constructionist understanding. The material body does not play an active, integral part in social relations.

I would like to argue, however, that a significant contribution is made by the work of Douglas, Foucault and Goffman: the body is conceptualised as “central to the lives of embodied subjects” (Shilling, 1993, p.71). The body is vital individually and socially, a key focus of social processes. While recognising the oppressive nature of the writings of Goffman and the overreliance on discourse by Foucault, the social constructionist understanding of the body allows us to challenge the dominant determinist views of disability and the body and to highlight the centrality of social relations in bodily and disability identity development.

4.3.4 *The corporeal body*

There is a clear need to bring together the two conceptualisations of the body, as on their own they can only provide a limited understanding of the body and disability. This ‘coming together’ of biological and social theory is, however, not straightforward and requires a complete reconceptualisation of the body. A possible way of achieving this draws on Goffman’s interpretation of the body, in particular his notion of *interactionism*. It is this recognition of *process* - the involvement of a person and their body - that is perhaps how the body can be rethought as biological *and* social. There are a number of implications of such an approach. Firstly, the body must be viewed as a temporal phenomenon, as something that changes throughout a person’s life. Secondly, these changes will be the result of biological and social processes acting together, with neither dominant over the other, and in the process all elements will be changed - body, biology and social processes. As a result, the body must be thought of as simultaneously a biological and social entity. Thirdly, the body becomes the ‘site’ of these processes, where these changes take place. So the body becomes a centre of social and biological processes: a focus, therefore, of not only the individual, but also of society.

Turner has developed a conceptualisation of the body that, as Shilling describes, “attempts to go beyond the limitations of naturalistic and social constructionist views of

the body” (1993, p.101). Turner’s ‘Regulating bodies’ (1992) proposes the concept of ‘*embodiment*’, the body as a ‘lived experience’, a biological and social entity that changes over time and is very much who the person is. This approach also takes the body seriously as a *material or corporeal entity, a real, concrete, biological ‘thing’, that acts, feels and emotes.*

4.4 Embodiment and disability: developing a theory

The essence of the critique of the social model of disability by Morris, Crow and French is the omission or sidelining of the lived experience of the impaired body. They all argue that if a comprehensive challenge to dominant oppressive understandings of disability is to be made, then the social model has to be ‘renewed’ to include the everyday processes of an impaired body. I want to argue that such a renewal demands a radical rethinking of the nature of disability. In this section I will attempt to develop what will be called an ‘embodied theory of disability’. As mentioned above this is not a straightforward task and the development of a theory will have to tackle the following issues: what is the materiality of disability and impairment? Is there a ‘real’, biological sense of impairment? If the body is a ‘site’ of social and biological processes, how does this actually work? What is the spatial nature of the process of embodiment? This section will attempt to answer these questions.

4.4.1 *Materiality and the body*

A distinguishing feature that separates the biological and social theories of the body is the role of real and bodily materiality. For the biological understanding, the materiality of the body - the flesh, the organs, the hormones - is all; it determines the actions and experiences of a person. For the social understanding, the body is a surface for the inscription of meaning and representation. So, the two theories see the (undeniable) existence of the body in completely different ways, put simply, as the cause and the result of social processes. But both see the body as *involved* in society and, more importantly, accept that its materiality - whether as biology or representation - *exists and matters*. There is certainly no doubt that we have bodies, real, fleshy, material bodies, but

how can we understand this 'realness'? One possible approach is to think of the biology of the body as a social construction and the social constructions of the body as physical or biological. This lets us make a 'crossover' between the two theories and see the complex interaction between biology and social processes. Another approach would be to blur the distinction between biological and social processes. In this conceptualisation, there would not be an attempt to show that biological processes are social or that social processes are biological, but that these processes are rethought as social/biological processes happening at the same time. So, bodily actions and processes, from walking to breathing, become understood as physical *and* social. And this is more than an interaction between, in the case of walking, feet and terrain; it is a process of 'social physicalness' - a motion from one place to another involving a person's mind and body. Walking involves 'all of you' in a purposeful process. Breathing, an instinctive action, connects the social and physical worlds through the body's need for oxygen, but also involves the inhalation of all kinds of other substances, dust, chemicals, nicotine, exhaust fumes and other natural/cultural elements we encounter in society. The line between physical and social becomes unclear.

Further, if we think about the possible blurring between social and physical/biological processes, then we can also think about the relationship between mind and body. As was discussed above, this is the fundamental binary division from which all dualisms - male/female, black/white, able/disabled - stem. Grosz (1994) conceptualises the mind-body relationship as continuous and inseparable, which she likens to a 'Mobius strip', that is, an inverted three-dimensional figure of eight. The mind and body can be thought of as the two sides of the strip, involving "an inflection of mind into body and body into mind, in ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another" (p.xii). If we can begin to rethink a person as consisting of such a mind *and* body entity, rather than as a mind *plus* body, then perhaps we can think of the materiality of the body as something which is both fleshy and tangible *and* mental and untouchable. And, further, that biological processes affect mind and body, not simply the body, and social processes affect the body as well as the mind. So, possibly, we can construct a sense of the body as a real entity, but one where 'real' is rethought as not just tangible, but as real in *process* and consequence. Materiality is then the mental and

physical 'contours' of the body and the way that these are produced and reproduced. Central here is the notion of change, so that 'reality' and 'materialness' are not fixed or certain, but continuously undergoing change both physically and mentally.

Crow (1996) argues that an effective renewal of the social model of disability can only occur if a recognition is made of "an individual's experiences of their body over time and in variable [social and environmental] circumstances" (p.218), and if these 'limitations' of an impaired person are included. I have argued above that Crow contributes much to the discussion of the social model, particularly reining in its more extreme constructionist tendencies. However, the materiality of the impairment is still assumed to be fixed, objective and certain, and the impairment is still separated from the social discrimination that is the disability. I would like to argue that the limitations, pain and fatigue experienced by people with impairments are not solely physical or biological experiences, but deeply social too. For example, a person who has a severe hearing impairment does not experience this in a neutral, objective way. The social contexts within which they interact, the nature of their relationships, friends and colleagues, their experiences of childhood, school and the medical profession, all involve and interact with the person's body (and hearing) in particular ways. These different contexts are not the 'barriers' of the social model, but instead the entire individual and social 'worlds' within which a person and their body exists. It is impossible, I would argue, to separate the physical or mental impairment - in this case the hearing difficulty - from the social context within which it is present. And, further, the 'reality' of the impairment shifts from being thought of as a biological certainty to a notion of process, a materiality that is real because it is happening. So the person's hearing impairment is a variable, changeable experience, always in process.

How far can we take this argument? Is there such a thing as bodily impairment, or is society deeply involved in all our experiences? Butler, in 'Bodies that matter' (1993), argues that the materiality of sex - male and female - becomes real over time, as it is produced and reproduced through discourse. As Butler puts it, "'Sex' is a regulatory ideal whose materialism is compelled and this materialisation takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, 'sex' is an ideal

construct which is forcibly materialised through time” (p.1). The way that Butler sees this materiality ‘becoming’ is through ‘performative’ processes, i.e. the whole array of individualised and social practices and processes, all framed by a series of regulatory norms, together produce the materialness or realness of the body. Now, of course, the body itself exists, but the way it is produced, changes, operates and is understood is down to, following Butler’s approach, the relations of power in society and regulatory norms. So, for Butler, the male and female bodies are constructed, or ‘made’, by social processes, they are not a pre-given, biological entity. Butler’s contribution to this debate is her assertion that in its search for explanation, constructionism has been “reduced to a verbal action ... and determinism” (p.7-9). She instead proposes that bodies be understood by focusing on the notion of *matter*. Attempting to trace a ‘third way’ through the essentialist and constructionist debate, she argues for the concept of *materialisation*, “a process that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (p.9). So, constructions become ‘real’ through reiteration and reproduction. Crucially, the ‘performativity’ process that produces this materiality is not a single event or act, but a long-term set of practices operating in a frame of regulatory norms.

Butler’s analysis is particularly useful in the way that it involves constructionist and biological themes in its notion of materiality. Butler manages the ‘trick’ of explaining real materiality as the result of social processes. And, importantly, she locates this production in a temporal context and within a set of social regulatory practices. This gives us a very real sense of the body as a process, but a process that operates within strong overall social practices. If we refer back to our example of the hearing-impaired person, we can now perhaps conceptualise, in addition to biological and social processes being inseparable, that a body is not free to ‘become’ what it wishes, but is produced and reproduced and so materialised through a set of social and cultural processes, such as discrimination against disabled people and the disabled people’s political movement, plus everyday social and environmental processes, as impaired and disabled.

Butler’s conceptualisation of materiality does not undermine the distinction between impairment and disability. It is important to state that even though the process of materialisation does produce the disabled body and many of the aspects of impairment,

there continue to be experiences, actions and feelings that even such a theory cannot include. Here Turner's (1992) notion of *embodiment* which considers the whole array of processes, personal and social, real and imaginary to be part of the 'body' (mind and body) of a person in society, is useful.

4.4.2 *The 'process' of embodiment*

Connell's sense of the 'gendered body' can possibly help us get to grips with the concept of embodiment. Connell, in 'Which way is up?' (1983), argues for the importance and role of biology in our lives, objecting to social constructionist theories that negate the physical and mental body. His significant addition to the debate, however, is that social practices change or *transform* the biology or form of the body. Connell uses the term 'transcendence' to describe this process. He uses examples of 'body labour' to show how bodies are actually changed by actions and events, such as fitness exercises building up the muscles, or desk-based work causing changes in the shape of the spine. In terms of gender, 'maleness' and 'femaleness' are produced in the body through social processes to create bodily difference. Examples are the social and cultural practices, such as education and the media, that encourage boys more than girls to engage in physical activity and to dominate personal and public space. Connell argues that these changes have lasting effects on the body, not just creating muscles and shape, but actually transforming posture, bone structure and hormone levels. So, social and cultural processes and practices become part of the person or are 'embodied'. Shilling (1993) adds to this discussion by suggesting that embodiment is not just restricted to physical changes or capabilities, such as extra strength or bodily shape, but also incorporates changes to the mind and a less tangible embodiment, for example the presence of power or sexuality. All social processes become incorporated into the body, but some are more visible than others. This process takes place over the whole of a person's life, making the body an 'unfinished' entity, continuously being renegotiated in terms of meaning and materiality (within, of course, relations of power).

Connell's concept of the 'transcendence' of the body gives a real sense of the interaction of social and biological processes in the body and captures at least part of

what embodiment is. We can see too how disabled bodies are produced and shaped by social and cultural processes and how this becomes real and fleshy in the body. For example, the social expectation of certain people with impairments to be wheelchair users, rather to walk in a 'difficult' way, can change the person's body so that they can only then use a wheelchair - the social construction of disability 'becomes' real. What is important about this is the embeddedness of these social and cultural effects. So, although this is a changeable sense of biology, change is not easy to accomplish; any change that does happen will do so over a period of time. The recognition of the role of the relations of power is important as well. However much we push the notion that the separation of able-bodied and disabled is a social construction, it does exist in a very real way and as Connell argues, is continuously reproduced. There is, of course, resistance, both organised and informal, to this dualism, but it is a longstanding and dominant set of relations.

Freund (1982) also considers the bodily materialisation of social processes and practices, but in slightly different way to Connell. Freund's work focuses on how emotional experiences, such as stress, loneliness and, I would add, relaxation and happiness, are manifested in the body as physical and mental 'imprints'. For Freund these experiences and their consequences are related to the social circumstances of the person involved and, further, these consequences then respond to and affect the social context. It is this last point which I consider to be most significant. Freund suggests, although not explicitly, that the body is a system of mind and body in constant interaction and, more specifically, that it is an *open system*, so involving social, cultural and environmental processes. These processes, in this open system, become part of the totality of the body, but do not simply lose their socialness or their inherent power relations; rather these become part of the body and then act back into society. The body, in this theorisation, becomes tightly wedded to society, the two elements become one. I would like to argue that Freund's conceptualisation of the body as an open system suggests several things in relation to disability. Firstly, it highlights the significance of the role of feelings and emotions in understanding our bodies, something that the social model of disability avoided addressing. Secondly, that it is not just the specific impairment that is important

to a person, it is the entirety of their physical and mental experiences. And, thirdly, it suggests the centrality of *history* to the process and understanding of the embodiment of disability.

The history of the body can be thought about in two different, yet related, ways. There are histories of the body in society, which consider how the body has been understood and materialised (i.e. in terms of diet, fashion, body culture) in different historical periods and societies. There is also the history of a particular body over its lifetime. In the context of our notion of embodiment the two are, of course, connected because the reproduction of certain body conceptualisations affects the particular experience of a single body. Elias's two volume study, 'The civilising process' (1978 [1939]; 1982 [1939]) examines the first of these notions of the history of the body. Elias argues that over the course of history there has been a 'civilising process' at work on the body, which has seen changes in behavioural 'rules' and emotional and action control, and the creation not of what we might think as a better body (what the term 'civilising' might suggest), but of a body in continual change. Crucially for Elias, and for our present argument, the body is an *unfinished* entity, which is both biological and social. Also, in his analysis of behavioural codes and the way that these are adopted by people, Elias makes the important point that such codes become internalised within the human body. This adds to our discussion above of Connell's work which argued that social processes became part of the physicality of the body. Here social codes become part of the human mentality. This too, I want to argue, is the embodiment of social processes. Disabled bodies have been produced over a long period of time in particular representations and forms, most commonly as weak and unable entities. The close connection that has been made between these forms of the disabled body and the biology of the body as impaired has been one of the central issues that the social model of disability has challenged.

How then can history inform our sense of the disabled body? Firstly, we must concede that these historical representations of disability have become a very real part of what disabled people are today. Disabled people have, within what Elias would call a 'civilising process', taken on or embodied the codes and rules of behaviour that have been expected of them. This does not mean that is no possibility of change, just that such

change in social attitudes and actions involves the reality of people's bodies. Secondly, there is the history of an individual's body. Over the course of a person's life the physical and emotional experiences they encounter and the physical and mental labour (of all kinds) they do will, in an embodied approach, become part of the body.

4.4.3 *The spaces of embodiment*

It is through our bodies that we experience space, the spaces we move through, the spaces we create and the space of the body itself. The above sub-section set out several ways that we can possibly understand the process of embodiment - the close interaction of social and biological processes, and the mental and physical materiality that is the result, a process that takes place in the spaces of the body.

The recent geographical interest in the body has brought space and spatial relations into the discussion around the body, in two main ways - the spaces in which the body operates and the space of the body itself. Much of the work has been around sexuality and gender. Valentine's study of lesbian friendships in the city (1993) noted a very strong body-space interaction, one that does more than pinpoint social barriers and discrimination, in that it considers space as central to the way that the body is understood, represented and formed in society. Rose in 'Feminism and geography' (1993) also argues that spatial relations are central to the production of people's bodies, in her case masculine and feminine bodies. Rose, in her analysis of this process, emphasises the practices of 'everyday life' and how these practices, individual and collective, institutional and personal, *make* the space of society. And, vitally, in relation to the overall argument of the chapter, these everyday practices are embodied, they are part of the person so are part of the making of space in society. Rose retreats from explicitly dealing with embodiment, preferring to understand this process as representations of the body. Important though for Rose are power relations, in so far as throughout the whole issue of the body in space run lines of power, oppression and resistance. For example, masculine everyday practices have over time produced spatial structures which exclude women. Although feminist thought and action has developed alternative strategies and created new spaces, there is no denying that the social world is largely designed by and

for men's bodies. Rose maintains, however, that the body is central to this debate, as it is where these relations of power and masculine and feminine identity are centred and at the same time where they have their effect. Rose writes of this as follows, "far from being natural, bodies are maps of the relation between power and identity" (p.32). The body is a place where social practices happen, but also, as the maps metaphor suggests, where these practices are marked or embodied. For Rich, whom Rose quotes, her body is a 'map of her specificity', who she is,

"To write of 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularly: I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me. Bones well nourished from the placenta; the teeth of a middle-class person seen by a dentist twice a year from childhood. White skin, marked and scarred by three pregnancies, an elected sterilisation, progressive arthritis, four joint operations, calcium deposits, no rapes, no abortions, long hours at the typewriter - my own, not in a typing pool - and so on" (1986, p.215, quoted in Rose, 1993, p.139).

Rich, Rose comments, also sees her body as placed geopolitically - as a woman, as Jewish, as an American and so on. So the body can be understood both as 'carrying' the effects of power relations and spatial structures and as being involved in their production and reproduction.

Several geographers have attempted analyses of the disabled body in space, all recognising that spatial processes have a central role in the production of structure and organisation of society. Imrie's study of the planning systems of the UK and USA (1996) argues that the construction and design of space both 'locks' disabled people out (sometimes literally) and is central to the creation of disability itself. Imrie understands disability as an oppressive social relation, the product of power-laden social practices, but he also recognises the centrality of a material body, the 'body in context' as he puts it, in these relations. Butler and Bowlby (1997), in a study of disabled people's experiences of public spaces, describe how the understandings of, and attitudes towards, disability, 'materialise' in space. They see the body, and particularly the involvement of the body in social and environmental interactions, as central to these experiences.

But what of the body itself? It is clear from the above that the body is a spatially produced and spatially producing entity, within a network of power relations that assign different bodies different values and different spaces. The body is spatial, in its actions

and its presence, and the body makes space through these practices. But how do these processes happen *within* the body? Pile and Thrift (1995) have usefully added to this discussion. As mentioned before, Pile and Thrift conceptualise the body as a place, a site where the social and spatial practices and processes that the individual encounters, meet and develop. They name the body as a 'point of capture', "where the dense meanings of power are animated, where cultural codes gain their apparent coherence and where the boundaries between the same and the other are installed and naturalised" (p.41). The body is where the subject, the person, the body, becomes, materialises as a reality, a reality that means something in the network of power and identity, what the authors describe as "intensifying grids of meaning and power" (p.41). But Pile and Thrift are still talking about representations of the body. The body is, as Rose (1993) described, a 'map of the relation between power and identity', but it is a *four-dimensional* map. The *inside* or materiality of the body, I argue, is where the identity and meaning of the body is realised.

From all this we can suggest the following issues: firstly, the connection between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the body; secondly, the understanding of the body as more than a surface, rather as a 'four-dimensional' entity (i.e. involving a temporal element); thirdly, the assumption of a 'body' that is body and mind together; fourthly, an understanding of reality that is both real and allows social practice to be involved - i.e. the notion that social construction is very real, material process; fifthly, the recognition of the inherently spatial nature of bodies and their practices; and lastly, the recognition that bodies and people are not free-floating, but operate within complex networks of power relations which restrict and legitimate particular bodies.

4.5 Conclusion: an embodied theory of disability

I would like to argue that an embodied theory of disability is both possible and vital, if we are to develop the social model of disability. This is perhaps my starting point - I approach disability very much from a social constructionist understanding, convinced of the social production of 'disability' as a category, in a dualistic relationship with able-bodiedness. Disabled people's experiences and restrictions most certainly stem from the

discriminatory social and physical barriers of an ableist society. However, there are concerns with such an understanding, particularly its 'complete' and uncomplex nature. For several, mainly feminist, disabled academics, the issue has been the omission or sidelining of the experiences of impairment that is an inherent and central part of disability. As French (1993a) argued, you cannot explain everything away with social constructionism. There was a call for a 'renewal' of the social model to include the physical and mental experiences of impairment, as Crow (1996) put it, to 'include all our lives'.

However, I have argued in the final section of this chapter that there is more that we can say in this respect. Using the theories of the body, I have attempted to show that the body is an integral part of people's and society's processes and practices. The body is the focus of social practices, absorbing such processes, being changed and then changing the processes in return. If we adopt such an approach we can no longer so easily think of or use the dualisms of mind and body, able and disabled and biology and society. The body, in Pile and Thrift's terminology (1995), is the 'point of capture', where the subject is centred, the centre of 'a grid of meaning' where social and cultural processes and practices, and physical and mental processes, meet, interact and change and then feed back out again. Crucially, these networks of meaning are mostly well-defined by relations of power and meaning.

We can perhaps think of disability as an identity that has both a real and a representational materiality. A person with an impairment is at the centre of a particular network of meanings, experiencing certain social processes and involved in particular spatial practices. 'Disability' is a product of the interaction of all of these processes and practice and because it all takes place in the 'site' of the body, then it is the individual with the impairment that experiences this disability. The disability is a social construction that varies over time and space and culture, but it is a very real, experienced social construction, because social processes (of oppression or liberation, medical or cultural, personal or social) are embedded or *embodied* within the person's body. This is not to say that the person's identity as disabled cannot change; change is indeed possible, but it cannot ignore the *history* of the body, the way that the body has been altered physically

and mentally. I want to argue that understanding disability as embodied retains the fundamental strength of the social constructionist model, yet manages to make it more personal and material, as well as enabling a politics of change to take place.

Chapter Five Disability and flexible employment

5.1 Introduction

The motivating question of the research was what the consequences of flexible employment practices have been for the employment opportunities of disabled people. Has the increased level of part-time, temporary and contract employment 'opened up' the labour market for disabled people as more and varied ways of working have become available, or have such changes further restricted and disadvantaged disabled people in employment? The central task of this chapter is to describe and discuss the concepts and practices of 'flexible employment' to enable an analysis of this question.

The Introduction set out why the focus of the study is *flexible* employment; namely, the research's overall concern with the *process* of employment, rather than with the input/outcome of employment. The fragmented and unstable nature of flexible working means that it is very much employment *in process*. Additionally, significant areas of employment, particularly in the service sector, are now adopting flexible methods of employment, a move which could have a major impact on the work chances and experiences of disabled people.

It is important to state how the term 'flexibility' will be used and what it refers to. As the Introduction outlined, the concept of 'flexibility' has been a characteristic of the organisation of employment since the reorganisation of industrial production in the late 1980s. What was conceived to be a reorganisation and reconceptualisation of the *whole* economy has, in the UK context at least, been interpreted in a particular labour market sense. In the UK economy 'flexibility' is understood to include labour market deregulation, more varied times of working, new types of employment contract and expectations of the skills and work ethic of employees. This is how flexibility will be understood and used in this chapter and the research as a whole. Labour market deregulation and new forms of working have become the 'standard' in the UK and US economies, if not adopted completely in practice, then at least the agreed 'position' and approach of most businesses.

'Flexibility' has received significant research attention, which can be roughly divided into two camps, those supportive and those critical of flexibility, that is, those who see flexible employment practices as both necessary and as the key to economic success, and those who see flexible practices as a further extension of employer power and a weakening of employee rights and labour market opportunity. This chapter will attempt to interrogate flexibility and flexible employment practices in a slightly different way. Firstly, it will attempt to reconceptualise the flexibility debate, shifting the focus of the discussion from the economic and organisational, to the cultural and representational. To be more specific, I want to argue that 'flexible' employment practices are about much more than economic rationality and decision-making, and that cultural factors and issues are an integral part of the flexibility process. Secondly, and following on from the previous chapter, I want to argue that flexible employment is an *embodied process*. What I mean by this is that employees involved in flexible employment are deeply, personally and bodily, involved in the work process. This 'embodied' understanding of flexible employment will, I argue, give us a better sense of the very real personal and social involvements and consequences of these changes to employment practice. Thirdly, most analyses of flexibility have not dealt with the issue of space. This seems strange as employment and economic activity more generally are inherently spatial activities, and space plays an integral part in the production and reproduction of employment processes. This is very much the case for flexible employment practices at two 'levels', in the labour market and within a company. These reflect the way that flexibility is debated, as flexibility in 'employment' (the labour market as a whole) and as flexibility in 'work' (organisation of work within a company). This chapter will argue that space and spatial practices are an integral part of the way that flexibility operates. The chapter will discuss these three issues and will propose that an embodied approach will allow us to think more effectively about disability and flexible employment.

5.2 Rethinking flexibility

Such is the dominance of the concept of 'flexibility' in the debate and discussion around employment and the economy, that it is difficult to engage with and deconstruct

the term. It is, however, absolutely necessary. There is no question that in the last twenty years there have been significant changes in the UK economy, with a general decline in manufacturing industry and concurrent growth in businesses usually associated with the service sector. There *is* some question, I would argue, that these changes have a coherence that can be named 'flexibility'. This is one reason for rethinking flexibility. The other reason, as hinted at above, is that 'flexibility' has most commonly been thought of as an issue of economic decision-making and rational business. There is, I would argue, a lot more to any economic situation than 'rational' decision-making. The understanding of economic and employment issues and the making of decisions involves representation, interpretation and power relations.

5.2.1 *The flexibility debate*

Piore and Sabel (1984) interpreted the changes in UK industry - the contraction of manufacturing and the expansion of services and the associated shift from full-time to part-time employment - as constituting a 'second industrial divide'. They claimed that the 1970s saw a crisis of mass Fordist production regimes as competition between firms became more intense and consumption more volatile. Firms responded by making themselves smaller and more adaptive to the changing economic situation, a change that Piore and Sabel termed 'flexible specialisation'. The two central elements of Piore and Sabel's conceptualisation were, first, the increased use of computer technology to run production more efficiently and so allow short runs of specialised products rather than big runs of mass consumption items (Meegan, 1988) *and*, second, the reorganisation of employees into teams with more control over their section of the production process (unlike the Taylorist principle of dividing the work process into single steps for individual employees). In the UK economy, new production techniques have been put in place, but only in certain sectors and, within these sectors, only in certain firms. Piore and Sabel's analysis, like much of the flexibility literature, appears to be more about how production *should* be organised, rather than how it is *actually* organised.

The Introduction argued that the concept of 'flexibility' originated in the debate over production techniques, as explained above, and has been 'transposed' onto the employment process. It is in the area of the organisation of employment that flexibility is now usually discussed. Atkinson (1984), at the same time as Piore and Sabel, argued that a polarisation had emerged within employment between a small 'core' of employees in companies and in the wider labour force who were in permanent and secure employment and a larger 'periphery' of workers who are employed on a 'needs only' basis in response to changing levels of production demand. Atkinson argues that the former group are 'functionally' flexible, i.e. undertake a variety of tasks and the latter are 'numerically' flexible, i.e. are taken on and laid off as demand changes. So, Atkinson's argument is that a divide - a 'dual labour market' - has emerged between full-time, permanent employees and those on part-time, temporary contracts, and that the process underlying this divide is the search for employment flexibility. Pollert (1988) contests Atkinson's thesis, claiming that there is no evidence for such a divide. She argues that there *has* been an increase in part-time and temporary working and firms are now using their workforces more 'efficiently'. However, there is no clear-cut divide within companies with the process of employment reorganisation cutting across all areas, albeit in different ways. Additionally, there is no evidence of any form of *structure* to this employment flexibility. The claimed reorganising of production within the 'flexible specialisation' model has not been transferred to employment. Peck (1989) argues that there is a clear distinction between the relative long-term and organised nature of flexible specialisation, and short-term and possibly unsustainable flexible labour markets. Curry (1993) extends this by claiming that whereas flexible specialisation is a structured, developed economic theory (and, to a limited extent, practice), flexible employment processes have no inherent structure, changing and developing as the processes and demands of business change.

The *ideology* of flexible specialisation in production technologies has been transposed onto the organisation of employment, or rather, a dual labour market that already existed has become a 'new idea', under the guise of flexibility, through which to reorganise the employment process. However, the technological production practices of flexible specialisation have manifested themselves quite differently in the labour market.

Documents from the Department of Employment have claimed that there is “significant labour market flexibility [in the UK]” (Beatson, 1995, p.55), on the basis of a number of indicators, such as number of part-time workers, ease of hiring and dismissing employees and the mobility of labour. However, there is no evidence of an *overall* flexible labour market in action. The undoubted rise in part-time workers and temporary employment contracts and the increased ability of employers to ‘hire and fire’, together do not make a ‘flexible economy’. Rather, they are a collection of loosely connected processes, operating to produce a complex labour market. Peck understands this as “flexible labour markets do not have a single, universal ‘logic’, but a variety of ‘logics’” (1992, p.333). There is a whole array of organising practices within employment, involving many features, some ‘flexible’, others certainly not so; the placing of these processes under a single, ideological banner is more a matter of politics than real employment economics and experiences.

I have argued above that flexibility operates on two ‘levels’: at the level of ideology and how the economy should operate *and* at the level of the labour market and company employment practices where the operation of flexible processes is highly varied, uneven and even contradictory. The two levels are of course connected: the ‘ideal’ of flexibility has become a key ideological message of the 1990s employment debate and has been used to ‘organise’ ideas and themes of employment restructuring, with the added power of ‘knowing it is right’. So the ideology became real in terms of employment restructuring and real in a whole variety of ways, as Peck (1992) has argued. Although all these different processes are often placed under the banner of ‘flexibility’, not all (if any) are clearly methods of flexibility, as prescribed by Piore and Sabel and Atkinson (both 1984). This research argues that both the ‘rhetoric’ and the ‘reality’ are important in the debate around flexibility, the one feeding into the other. It is, in fact, the disparity between the two that is the reason for both the importance and the difficulties of flexibility.

The central debate in flexible employment practice is its potential effect on the experiences and opportunities for employees. This debate has formed the dividing line politically and theoretically. It has been understood as an ‘employer versus employee’

issue with one inevitably gaining and the other losing out, in a power struggle over rights and control. For employers, it is argued, the deregulation of the labour market which is an integral part of flexible employment practice, creates significant powers to adjust, change and demand new work practices from employees. Conversely, employees in this relationship lose power, rights and an active part in the decisions over their employment experience. The alternative scenario is that flexible working practices generate greater freedoms for both employers and employees, by deconstructing the rigid frames of employment organisation. The issue at the heart of this debate, then, is power and more specifically *power relations*.

As the Introduction outlined, the motivating question of the research is what impact flexible employment practices have had on the opportunities for disabled people in employment. The question hinges on the connection between the requirements of business and the requirements of disabled people. It is when the needs of a company or organisation in terms of number of employees, skills and working times, are the same as those demanded by a disabled person that a positive opportunity is created. This opportunity may be both real, as in an actual job, and representational, as in generating a more positive understanding of disabled people in flexible employment. The key issue then is, what are the processes that make or do not make this connection? Below, I will discuss the main elements of flexible employment practice and their possible implications for disabled people.

5.2.2 *Flexible employment and disability*

A significant part of the debate around flexible employment is concerned with political and cultural *ideology*, with issues of employer and employee power relations and company and national economic efficiency at the heart of the discussion. What is important here is that this takes the debate around flexible employment *beyond* economic decision-making and into issues of politics, meaning and representation (see 5.2.3). Flexibility has become part of the economic ‘rule book’, indicating how the economy and employment *should* be organised and showing the only true way to personal, company and national prosperity. In the last five years this interpretation has solidified, making an

alternative approach difficult to develop. Flexibility and flexible employment practices have become the accepted method of organising the economy and employment. Importantly, this does not mean that every company, organisation and employee is now working flexibly, but rather that this is 'how it should be'. The way that employees are being reconstructed and re-presented is central to this new hegemony of flexibility.

Flexible working arrangements have been translated into new understandings of employees. The desire of companies to organise their production (in manufacturing or service sectors) 'efficiently' has led to a demand for workers to be available to fulfil these production requirements - to work at different times and on different days, to work 'unsocial' hours, to do more than one task, to have limited time contracts - and become *flexible workers*. This has developed further into an expectation of employees to be flexible in mind and body, to respond to the changing demands of the company and the economy. Demand for different ways of working has also come from many employees and potential employees, an issue often belittled by opponents of flexibility. People with children or elderly relatives, semi-retired, or with other commitments, have seen the flexible labour market as full of opportunities to organise work within the overall context of their lives. An Employment Department report (Beatson, 1995) comments that such an 'opening up' of the labour market through methods of flexible working, "may increase the flexibility of the labour supply by drawing into the labour market those who would be unable or unwilling to undertake full-time permanent work" (p.57). So, is there a coming together of the needs of employers and the needs of employees? It would seem that there is, but only for particular people in relation to particular types of flexible working. So, for example, for women with young children and certain skills, let's say in secretarial or clerical work, a part-time post in an office for three afternoons a week would be a mutually beneficial combination. Similarly, for those caring for an elderly relative, some computer-based homeworking could suit their situation well. On the other hand, for an out of work manager who is used to full-time employment and has significant financial commitments, an uncertain temporary contract will not be the opportunity they desire. Equally, for a young person a few mornings here and there in a retail company will not

make it possible for them to earn enough money to leave the unemployment register or support themselves.

For disabled people there is a similar collection of possibilities and restrictions offered by flexible employment practices. The huge variation is both within disabled people - their expectations, abilities and availability - as well as in the employment available. It is clear that the possible coming together of disabled people and flexible employment involves much more than a rational, economic decision (on both sides). There are clear issues of discrimination, access, attitudes and recruitment and so on that are inherent in any employment decision (see Chapter One). Below I will consider the main elements of flexible employment and how they may interact with the varied needs and expectations of disabled people.

Part-time work Part-time employment has always been seen as a central part of the (supposed) move to flexible employment and described as one of its success stories. Whatever definition is used, the number of people doing part-time work in the UK has certainly increased dramatically.¹⁹ Using Labour Force Survey data, the number of part-time employees rose from 3.2 to 5.8 million between 1971 and 1994 and, more importantly, the proportion of part-time workers (of all employees) has gone from 15 per cent to 28 per cent in the same period. The service sector dominates in the use of part-time employees - 35.6 per cent compared to 7.3 per cent in the production industries - and within this, certain industries are prominent users of part-time employees, in particular cleaning, hotels and catering and retail. There is a notable presence of women in part-time employment. While overall employee numbers have now reached roughly a gender balance (in 1993, women made up 49.5 per cent of the workforce, *The Guardian*, 1995c), four out of five part-time workers are women. If we combine this gender imbalance with the industrial sector pattern above, we can see that part-time service work is made up of 80 per cent women. Beechey (1987), in a powerful argument, claims that gender and employment process are closely entwined: women are not only understood as suitable for

¹⁹ It is important to note that part-time, while a significant phenomenon, is by no means a new process. Chapter Two argued that part-time work, in its formal sense, began during the two world wars.

certain skills and occupations, but are also seen to be available to work at certain times, for certain periods, with the underlying assumption that women have family and caring responsibilities (which they may or may not have). Beechey argues that for many women the labour market is a self-fulfilling prophecy, i.e. employers take on women in part-time occupations because they understand there is a demand for part-time work amongst women, while women demand part-time work because that is what they think is available. The representation of women and employment is reinforced by continual placement in, and demand for, jobs. Beechey supports the common claim that part-time employment has offered opportunities for women,

“[women] now have greater access to paid employment than in any period (other than the two world wars) since the onset of the industrial revolution ... Since part-time working has enabled married women with dependent children (more specifically, white married women) to undertake paid employment, its growth must be regarded as a positive change” (p.215).

However, she has concerns,

“there is a danger that new forms of division will become firmly institutionalised within the labour market and will severely limit people’s employment opportunities. It is quite likely that many women will only find badly paid and unprotected part-time jobs open to them” (*ibid.*).

This is significant for our current discussion because the presence of so many women in part-time employment could signify that this expanding area of work offers opportunities for groups formerly excluded from the workforce, which could include disabled people. It also significant because of the clearly restricted nature of most part-time work, i.e. the limited area of employment that part-time work dominates and the generally poor quality jobs offered means that while there may be work opportunities for disabled people, the openings will not offer well-paid, quality employment.

There is only minimal evidence, however, for the position of disabled people in part-time work. Chapter One used the 1995/6 Labour Force Survey to show that a higher proportion of disabled people are in part-time employment than the whole sample of employees. There is a gender bias amongst disabled people in part-time employment too, with 12 per cent of disabled men and 52 per cent of disabled women in this kind of job (the comparative figures for all employees are 6 per cent for men and the 43 per cent for women). Importantly, this data is based on *registered* disabled people and so leaves out a

significant number of disabled people in employment. However, it gives us a rough idea of the possible advantages that part-time work offers for (some) disabled people. For people with particular impairments, being able to work for a limited number of hours in the week is most definitely positive, as it provides an income in a controllable, suitable manner. It is important to state, however, that this does not encompass *all* disabled people. Such is the highly variable nature of impairment and the experiences of disabled people that part-time work is certainly no panacea. It offers opportunities for some, but for others not even working part-time is possible and for many disabled people a full-time job is what they want and what they are capable of. There are two other issues here: firstly, on benefits, part-time employment, particularly if it is low paid, can be of little financial advantage to disabled people if they are on significant state benefits (i.e. much more can be lost in benefits than can be gained from an employment wage). Secondly, there is evidence (again from the Labour Force Survey, 1995/6) that disabled people are concentrated in low-level occupations and this is certainly the case in part-time employment. So, part-time employment is something of a paradox for disabled people because it offers possible opportunities for those who cannot work an eight hour day, five day week, but offers usually lower wages in return in lower status occupations. At certain moments in the process of employment, then, the opportunities of part-time employment connect to the needs of disabled people for employment, but mostly the situation is one of further exclusion from employment for disabled people.

Flexitime and self-management Part-time work, despite being included under the banner of 'flexibility', can in fact be as rigid as full-time employment. If the contract is permanent, or at least relatively permanent, then a part-time job - say three mornings per week - offers little flexibility. There is a significant difference between this form of flexibility and a job that allows either an official system of 'flexitime'²⁰, or through 'self-management' of an employee, i.e. there is a certain task to do and it is left to the employee to decide when and how to organise their time (and sometimes space) to

²⁰ The term 'flexitime' is used here to describe working some fixed core hours, but outside this an ability to make up the hours either within the day or the week, as the employee sees fit.

achieve this. Flexitime exists in many areas of employment, but self-management is present mostly in professional and managerial occupations where the work is task-oriented and 'driven' by the employee. There is some self-management in retail employment, but it is of a limited nature (du Gay, 1997a). It is in this area of flexible working that flexibility in employment begins to fall into two quite distinct categories, based around the issue of *power*. Firstly, there is flexible working over which the employee has no control, for example many elements of part-time working and temporary contracts (see below). And secondly, there is flexible working that gives the employee a significant degree of, if not complete, control. So any evaluation of flexible working and, in particular, its implications for disabled people, must take this distinction into account. Clearly for some disabled people having control over when one works and for what blocks of time would be an advantage. For many other disabled people it is not an issue as they do not need such control *or* it is the opposite as they require a fixed structure of work and are either unable or unwilling to organise their own work structure.

Temporary contracts It was mentioned above that the *status* of an employee is just as important as the 'times' they work. The security or insecurity of a job, whether it is permanent or temporary or even a 'zero hours'²¹ contract, is perhaps the most important aspect of employment practice. In Atkinson's thesis (1984), temporary or contract work is one way in which employers achieve 'numerical flexibility' in their peripheral workforce. Beatson (1995) claims that temporary work has remained fairly steady over the past ten years, at about five to six per cent of the workforce. As with part-time working, it is service sector industries that use most temporary workers and in similar occupations, that is, hotels and catering and retail. Also, temporary work is dominated by women, though not to the same degree as part-time work. There is a difference, however, between temporary work and contract work, in that the former is concentrated in these particular areas of the service economy, while the latter is increasingly found right across the economy. It is increasingly common now for

²¹ A zero hours contract is one where the employee has no guaranteed working hours, working and being paid only when required.

permanent situations of employment to be replaced by contracts, either over a fixed time period - from three days to five years - or for a particular task or project.

What temporary employment and contract work do share though is a sense (and a reality) of *insecurity*. Allen and Henry (1997) use Ulrich Beck's analysis of 'risk' (1992) to consider the 'contractualisation' of employment. They argue that the underside of employment flexibility is insecurity and uncertainty for employees, "If flexibility is the language of the firm, perhaps risk is more appropriately the language of the workforce" (1997, p.183). However, Allen and Henry rightly point out that in the same way that the notion of flexibility should not be 'overstretched' to include all employment change, so insecurity should not be overused to critique flexibility. Temporary work is - by definition - an insecure form of work, but a lot of part-time work is stable employment with people remaining with the same employer and often in the same job, for several years. With recent improvements in employment rights for part-time workers (The Guardian, 1997g), (literal) employment security is becoming more common too. For many contract workers too, employment is stable if not legally secure. So, the crucial feature of this employment experience is not the *type* of jobs they are doing (i.e. as flexibility theory would see it), but the level of security or *risk*.

Homeworking and tele-working Homeworkers have some control over the timing of their work and it also challenges the spatial organisation of work by centring employment in the home, not at a central workplace. It has been estimated that by 1995 there would be 3.3 to 4 million UK employees working at home (The Guardian, 1993), but the actual figure, although significant, has never reached these levels. Companies see homeworking as advantageous because it reduces the cost of office space, transport and, some claim, raises productivity. And, for some people, homeworking is a valuable opportunity because it allows work to be combined with household or family commitments. Importantly, however, homeworking can be divided into two, quite different, work situations: for some people, such as managers, editors and academics, working at home is an attractive and possible option, as the home provides a peaceful atmosphere and they can control their work. For other people, homeworking is done out of necessity, either

because no other work is available or because they have to stay at home, through illness, disability or caring responsibility. The latter type of homeworking usually involves lower skill level work, such as assembly, computer data input and clerical work. So, in a similar way to the other forms of flexible working, homeworking provides limited opportunities for some disabled people. Hamblin (1995) cites a computer company, who “originally started a system of homeworking to retain the skills of workers who had become disabled or were unable to commute long distances because of illness” (p.476). There are certainly instances where homeworking becomes a positive option for appropriately skilled disabled people, but this is certainly the exception rather than the rule. For most disabled people homeworking cannot offer decent employment opportunities, despite its seeming suitedness for a significant number of disabled people.

Allen and Henry (1997) also provide a valuable way of rethinking flexibility, as they attempt to challenge the ‘completeness’ of the flexibility hegemony. They argue that while elements in the economy may be using new ‘flexible’ techniques of production and employment organisation, it is wrong to bring this all together under the single banner of ‘flexibility’. More importantly, interpreting economic change through ‘flexibility’ can lead one to, firstly, focus on how firms use their workforces, rather than the perspectives of the employees themselves and, secondly, it can lead to a tendency to focus on the different groups in the flexible workforce such as part-time and temporary workers, which, they argue, can obscure the more significant and broader changes in the organisation of employment throughout the economy.

Beck (1992) argues that risk is now an integral part of all aspects of modern life. In the area of employment, the old (supposed) certainties of permanent, full-time employment have increasingly been replaced by a new set of employment relations based on individualised contracts, variable hours and lengths of jobs - overall, a less certain and ‘riskier’ work context. The outcome is that the division between employment and unemployment becomes less certain, as people move in and out of different types of employment, with insecurity a permanent feature of the employment experience. Beck further argues that flexibility is really the *individualisation* of employment,

“In this sense, one could say that Taylor’s ‘philosophy of dismemberment’ is transferred from the substantive aspects of labour to the temporal and contractual relations of employment. The starting points for this new ‘Taylorism of employment relations’ are no longer situated in the combination of labour and machine, but in the temporal limitation, legal (non-)protection, and contractual pluralisation of the employment of labour” (1992, p.147, quoted in Allen and Henry, 1997, p.185).

So, flexible employment is in fact a highly organised form of employment, with insecurity running through it, where employment is both regularised but at the same time uncertain (risk becomes an integral part of the employment process). Important though this ‘risk’ is, it works in very different ways for different people in the labour market. For those in low paid jobs of low occupational status, employment insecurity or risk is wholly negative as it forces the employee to try and hold onto their job in a climate of uncertainty. However, for those in a more powerful position, such a climate of uncertainty can produce further opportunities in employment, as new ways of working become possible.

5.2.3 *Culturing flexibility*

It was argued above that the position and experience of disabled people in ‘flexible employment’ was about more than rational economic decision-making. Both employers and disabled job seekers have many more processes involved in the employment relation and practice. From the way that ‘flexibility’ is represented and the way that the capabilities and demands of disabled people are represented, to the everyday organisation and (in)security of work and the expectations of different parts of the workforce, social and cultural debates are deeply involved in the process of flexible employment.

It is revealing that at the same time that ‘flexibility’ has achieved a kind of hegemonic status in employment ideology (less so in practice) and is understood as the rational, even ‘natural’, way of organising employees, the notion of ‘culture’ has begun to be involved in economic, or more precisely corporate, debate. As du Gay (1997b) argues, ‘culture’ has entered the organisational discussion because many companies now see the management of *meaning* in employment as crucial to success, because if,

“people come to conceive of and conduct themselves in such a way as to maximise their involvement in, and hence their contribution to, the organisation for which they work, you are more likely to have a profitable, effective and successful firm” (p.1).

The binary of ‘economy’ and ‘culture’, between rationality and irrationality, and between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’, can perhaps be better thought of as a complex, mutual, constitutive relationship. A crucial point to make here is that what is usually thought of as purely economic - such as employment - is deeply cultural and vice versa. Du Gay borrows Allen’s term, the *cultural economy*, to capture the notion of culture and the economy working together, “economic processes and practices are cultural phenomena, depending on meaning for their effective operation” (*ibid.*, p.4). Perhaps, in the context of the overall argument, a good example of this is the representation of the flexible economy as a complete ‘package deal’ (after Schoenberger, 1989) - an overall process that is ‘right’. The ‘discourse’ of flexibility relies on cultural reproduction, through Government policy, the media and business word and action, to maintain its position. Thinking of flexibility in this way, we can see cultural processes in the way that people are organised in work, and the way that they understand their relation with their job and their position within the company - in other words their ‘work identity’.

So, in a sense, there is no need to ‘culture’ flexibility as cultural processes are an inherent part of the practices of flexible employment. Crang (1997), in a reflection on the ‘cultural turn’ in economic geography, asks, “what becomes of the ‘economic’ in an encultured economic geography?” (p.4). Crang, in a similar way to du Gay (1997b), sees the heart of the matter as economic geography beginning to take issues of meaning and representation seriously and also the fact that culture is a *process*. Thus, any analysis of flexible employment should involve an analysis of employment practice, rather than simply a fixed system of organisation. There *are* moments of fixity in employment practice which are sometimes temporary and sometimes permanent. This is crucial, as it is vital to accept that cultural processes are very real and material in their existence and effect. A focus on representation and meaning can encourage one to obscure the material; in the case of flexibility, such things as wage levels, hours and relations with management. The more ‘productive’ way of understanding the relationship between

culture and the economic is the complex way in which they work together, are contingent on one another, with strong relations of power working through them (see Allen, 1997). The process that makes cultural processes become economic realities is *materialisation* - of products, of employment practices, of consumption and of regulation. The issue of *materialisation* will be explored in greater detail in the following section, through the concept of *embodiment*.

So, 'culturings' the economic and flexibility is not an exercise in *denying* the processes and practices of business and organisational decision-making, or pretending that forms of 'economic rationality' do not exist and are used. What it is, is a recognition that cultural practices - of representation, meaning and power - have always been a part of this decision-making. The development and management of flexible employment has cultural processes deeply 'embedded' in its economic practice. The representation of work as an individual responsibility, the shift in meaning of what an employee is and the central role of power relations, are all ways in which cultural forces are real economic processes. The 'coming into being', or materialisation, of these representations and meanings, is what this research is concerned with. The very word itself, 'flexibility', is deeply imbued with representations and meanings and is certainly highly contested. What does being flexible actually mean ? It is how such a powerful concept becomes materialised, becomes embodied, that is discussed below.

5.3 Embodying flexibility

Central to the above discussion was a blurring of the distinction between the economic and the cultural and, perhaps more importantly, a recognition of the mutually constitutive nature of 'construction' and 'materiality'. So 'cultural' understandings are simultaneously representational and material. Similarly, material things and experienced processes are understood through cultural and representational meanings. We can conceptualise this co-constitution of the material and the representational through the process of *materialisation*. So, we have argued that flexible employment is a process of materialisation of cultural and economic constructions and materialities, within a network

of power relations within the cultural-economic context that is the UK economy in the late 20th century.

This section will take this thinking a little further by considering the focus of the flexible employment process, i.e. the employees, and how the process of flexibility is materialised in the *bodies* of the workers. I will argue that flexible employment is essentially an embodied process and only by recognising this and rethinking flexibility in this way, can the full complexity and importance of flexibility be tackled. The impact of flexible employment on the opportunities, constraints and experiences of disabled people can be approached using such a conceptualisation. This section will consider three issues: firstly, how can we conceive of employment as embodied? Secondly, how, in particular, is flexible employment embodied? And thirdly, how, using this understanding, can we rethink the impact of flexible employment on disabled people?

As the Introduction argued, it is clear that employment is an embodied process. *Of course* we use our minds and bodies in our employment and *of course* employers base employment decision-making partly on the capabilities and experience of their workers' bodies. In the day-to-day practice of employment organisation, then, the bodily nature of employees is central. However, most analyses of employment do not include any notion of the bodily involvement in what is commonly understood as a purely economic relation. Halford and Savage (1997), in a study of organisational change, argue that employees are more than just passive recipients of company restructuring - they react and respond. And, in fact, the way the employees are understood by management and understand themselves is deemed to be central to the restructuring process. Halford and Savage's particular take is around *gender*, which they argue is central to the restructuring process itself, through organisational cultures and management decision-making practices. In support of this view, they argue that gendered relations within organisations are not solely caused by external social factors but also come from *within* the organisation itself. So, gender is *embedded* within the organisation and its practices, at all levels; individuals make restructuring happen as well as having it happen to them (with different degrees of power, of course).

McDowell and Court (1994) argue that in many parts of the service sector, the gendering of employment has greater importance as the employee is often the product and so their gender and bodiliness is central. Further, changes in employment organisation always involves - in a whole variety of ways - changes in the *employees* in that organisation. These changes are not simply in the roles and expectations of the employees, but also in the identities, and I would like to emphasise, the *bodies* of the workers. The body, as argued in Chapter Four, should be conceptualised as the mind *and* physical body, closely connected, in the fashion of a 'Möbius strip', each feeding into and reacting to the other. So, a new role for an employee will involve usage of, and change in, the person's mind and body. And, this process is full of power relations, as certain jobs are given to people on the basis of their perceived bodily capabilities - and so the reproduction of employment experiences continues (some bodies are excluded completely, or put in very particular roles, see McDowell, 1997). McDowell (1997) extends this discussion in her study of the City of London. She argues that in an ever increasing number of service sector occupations, the employees *become* the product they are selling, and through the disciplined *performance* that they give their body becomes different. This notion of 'performance' invokes the work of Butler (1990, 1993), who makes a strong connection between the performance of certain attributes and a person's identity. Butler also adds that this performance has a real effect on the person, materialising in their body and making them who they are (adding to who they already are). This 'performance' can range from posture to appearance, dress to speech, confidence to communication and is expected to be, and becomes, different between, in McDowell's case study, women and men.

Du Gay (1996, 1997a) makes a particular observation of the increased responsibility over the management of work given by some service companies and uses the example of British Airways self-management and self-organised team-working. However, du Gay makes a further valuable contribution to the debate with his concept of 'making up' workers. As du Gay comments this phrase suggests, "a material-cultural process of formation or transformation, whereby the adoption of certain habits or dispositions allows an individual to become - and become recognised as - a particular sort

of person” (p.314). This concept is useful because it assumes a close connection between a person and their employment, it recognises that a person’s work identity is always unfinished in a continuing process and it locates this connection and process in the employee’s body. ‘Making up’ an employee in a particular job or work organisation (such as flexible employment) is at the same moment a cultural, an economic and a material process. In du Gay’s research on retail employment (1996) he comments that, “through their training in transactional analysis [i.e. making a sale], for example, employees are not only being taught how to produce meaning for customers and a sale for their company, they are also being taught to conduct themselves as certain sorts of persons - as self-regulating, self-actualising, responsible individual actors who are perpetually responsive to fluctuations in their environment [and] service work in occupations such as retailing concerns the simultaneous production of profit, of meaning and of identity” (p.316).

This ‘discursive constitution’ of employees, in what I would emphasise is an embodied process, is central to our discussion here. Hochschild’s now classic study of the employment practice of flight attendants shows clearly how job roles and expectations become part of who you are, they become embodied. Her aptly titled, ‘The managed heart’ (1988), looked at how the attendants were trained to provide service to the airline passengers. The training assumed no ‘natural’ skills to serve and so the employees had to be *worked on and work on themselves* to *become* the person for the role. This working on oneself was not simply a *surface* phenomenon, such as a false smile or a few rehearsed welcoming words. Hochschild observed that both the trainers and the attendants rejected such ‘surface acting’, realising that to sustain such a type or level of service they would have to use ‘deep acting’ (Shilling, 1993). She termed this ‘managing of the heart’, *emotional labour*. This control over the body, over the emotions, appearance, movement and overall ‘deportment’, becomes materialised in the body, from wrinkles in the face from frequent smiling, to maintaining a low weight and bodily ‘attractiveness’, to an agile body to bend and stretch, move and stand, in the practice of the job. Hochschild also noted the physical and mental impact for flight attendants: back problems from constant lifting and pushing, varicose veins from standing for long periods, foot problems from inappropriate ‘fashion’ shoes, hearing loss from aircraft noise and sleep deprivation caused by frequent time-zone changes. Mentally, the nature of the job, the constant

'happiness', 'pleasantness' and the underlying assumption that 'the customer is always right', were seen to cause high levels of mental stress, anger and boredom. As Chapter Four noted, we cannot separate mental and physical processes and, certainly in this case, mental stress results in physical problems and an unhealthy or damaged physical body definitely leads to mental stress. The whole of the attendants' body is involved in their job, the job is part of who they are.

How, then, can we understand the embodied nature of flexible employment? We have seen in the argument above that work practices become part of the body - mental and physical - of the person engaged in that work. Employment is undoubtedly embodied, so are there any additional issues in relation to flexible employment? In some ways it could be argued that flexible working is still work and so the bodily interactions of an employee exist in all areas of employment. However, I would like to contend that there are particular issues in flexible employment that create certain issues of impairment. Flexible employment, for all the criticism of the ideology and practice, has forced a rethink of the relation between people and employment. It has certainly challenged, if not changed, the 'rules' and structures of employment.

There are three issues of importance here. Firstly, flexible employment, in many cases, has developed new practices of the usage of *space and time* inside (and outside) the workplace. Clearest among them is the change in the organisation of time, including the breakdown of work into units of time and the 'loosening' of defined working hours. This means that people are often not continually and fixedly in the same time-space of employment, instead moving in and out of the space of employment for the appropriate time slot or number of hours. Spatially, employees may commonly work in different parts of the same work environment or in different locations outside the central workplace. This shift to uncertainty is the chief characteristic of flexible employment, as discussed above. The challenge to the spaces and times of work generated by some forms of flexible employment can be rethought through the body and embodiment. What this does is two-fold: firstly, it recognises the actual process of this working in shifting space-time and the demands of the 'body' in terms of physical and mental ability and capability. Secondly, it 'centres' these changing structures and understandings of work in the

experience of people in work, i.e. it conceptualises the challenges to understandings of space-time in the form of what actually happens to an employee.

The second issue is around *skills*. There is a long-standing discussion within the sociology of employment centred on the concept of 'skills', where the main argument is that skills are not 'naturally' given, but socially learnt (Jenson, 1989). Jenson focuses on gender, arguing that "the distinction between women as non-skilled and men as skilled is a social construct" (p.151). I would like to argue that skills, as with all other parts of a job, *are* learnt, but then crucially become embedded or *embodied* in the employee. An example is in clerical office employment, with a secretary using a computer to type letters and reports. The secretary uses the computer all day and in doing so acquires skills in computer applications and in time-management as s/he decides which tasks to do. Now, these skills are not learnt one day and then forgotten the next. When a person learns a skill, the learning process and the usage of the skill become part of the person in question, through changes in the mind and body of the person, such as the usage of the brain in different ways and the issues of posture, air, atmosphere, stress and so on, that are part of a modern office environment. Skills and the bodily actions involved are learnt and cannot easily be unlearned and undone. A central issue in some types of flexible employment is the move towards 'multi-skilling' and the concurrent de-defining of established skill types and structures. We have already seen that multi-skilling was an ideal of the advocates of flexibility and that 'multi-tasking' is now the more useful way to understand flexible working (see Allen and Henry, 1997). But it can be argued that multi-tasking is a skill in itself and that flexible employment has indeed begun a shift in the understanding of 'skill'. An embodied perspective sees the skills situation in flexible employment as one of a continually changing body in relation to work, but at the same time a body that is physically and mentally changed by learning skills and so a body that 'builds up' or accumulates skills and understandings of skills over time. The other area of importance is in the particular skills of flexible employment. We have discussed above the new demands in particular parts of the service sector for employees to 'self-manage' in terms of time and customer interactions (see du Gay, 1997a). Du Gay (1996) makes a significant play of the 'presentation of the self' in this type of employment, i.e. the

importance of the interaction between employee and customer. There are now, perhaps, new skills, involving a very upfront and central use of the body in some areas of flexible employment.

Thirdly, how does the above discussion help in rethinking the impact of flexible employment on disabled people and disability? If we now consider that flexible employment is a very bodily form of employment, that the body is central and 'worked on', then how is this important for disabled people? An initial argument is that (embodied) flexible employment has similar demands of *all* employees and, further, that for some disabled people the situation is perhaps more difficult because of the structures of flexible employment - the times worked, the spaces worked in - rather than its embodied nature. However, there are certain issues in relation to disability that are raised if we think flexible employment through in embodied terms. Firstly, on the issue of time-space, it can be argued that disability, as an embodied social construction, is produced and reproduced through space and spatial practices. If, as part of the reconfiguration of employment through the process of flexibility, the spaces of work are challenged and changed, then disability will be reconstructed in meaning and consequence. In the changes in the structure of time within flexible employment, disability may be rethought through the 'rhythms' of bodies in space, i.e. who is where and when and what they are doing, as some people with different bodies become involved in the time-spaces of employment, while others are excluded. Secondly, on skills, an embodied approach to flexible employment and disability enables a critique of the idea that skills and multi-tasking can be rapidly learnt and re-learned as changing employment demands. This embodiment of skills, the 'building in' of skills into the body occurs for all employees, but for those excluded from the workforce, or those in particularly defined areas of employment, which is the case for many disabled people, this shift may pose difficult issues. It also may offer opportunities to disabled people, as the change in demand for skills may include the skills of people currently excluded.

5.4 Conclusion

An embodied approach to flexibility allows a reassessment of the phenomenon of flexible employment. It *is* a 'phenomenon' in one sense of the word, as the concept of 'flexibility' has become extremely powerful in employment and management debates. As such, one of the aims of this chapter has been to rethink and deconstruct how flexibility and flexible employment are understood and just what effects there are on the everyday practices and processes of employment.

The chapter has made two main points: firstly, it has attempted to reconceptualise the flexibility debate, shifting the focus from the organisational and economic to the cultural and representational, making the claim that flexible employment practices are about much more than economic rationality and include powerful issues of representation and discursive understanding. Secondly, it has argued that flexible employment is an embodied process, that is, all employees involved in flexible employment have powerful and deep interactions with their employment and the connections between them and their employment experience go much further than a contract of employment. The very action of and involvement in work makes a close connection between people and their employment and changes them bodily, physically and mentally.

This rethinking of flexibility as an embodied process allows us to think of the situation for disabled employees in a rather different way. Rather than thinking simply of the relation between disabled people and employment as one of opportunity and restriction (in equal amounts), we can reconceive the relationship as complex and embodied and thus as people involved deeply in their work. This strength of connection between disabled people and employment offers greater opportunities for employment and also locks people into poorer positions of employment. A rethinking of flexible employment casts this reworking of employment in a different perspective, one which recognises the embeddedness and, indeed, embodiedness of employment.

Chapter Six The empirical approach

6.1 Introduction

The preceding three chapters have worked through the major theoretical questions and debates of the issues of disability, employment and the body. This present chapter can be seen as the 'lens' through which these issues will be focused. It will describe the process of the fieldwork undertaken to explore the theoretical issues discussed and the relationship between theoretical ideas and empirical investigation. Theory is not something to be proved or disproved by empirical work. Rather, the two should work in an ongoing symbiotic relationship, each continually informing and shaping the other. This, however, is difficult to achieve. The chapter will acknowledge and explore the complexities of doing qualitative research.

The process of the empirical work attempted to reflect this: rather than a sequential 'theory, fieldwork, write up' process, the fieldwork took place across a large part of the research period. Although this did present some issues of consistency, with later empirical work focusing on slightly different theoretical and practical issues than initial ones, it did allow the work to develop over the research period.

This chapter has several purposes: firstly, to connect the previous theory chapters to the subsequent empirical analysis. Within this theme, the direction of the argument will be made clear, that is, the focus on the discourses of the organisations and companies around disability and employment. Secondly, to describe and explain the process and methods used in the fieldwork and data analysis. And, thirdly, to consider the issues of positionality and ethics involved in the research.

6.2 Theory into practice (and back again)

The motivating question of the research was what impact have new flexible methods of employment had on the employment opportunities and experiences of disabled people. As the Introduction explained, this initial concern has transformed, through theoretical consideration, into a series of questions and issues. As the research has progressed the theoretical questions and empirical approach have been challenged

and (re)shaped as the issues and understandings have changed. This section will consider how this process has worked in more detail and how the relationship between the theory and empirical work developed over the research period and the implications for the outcomes of the research. But first it is useful to think about, or theorise, the research method itself.

6.2.1 Method and conceptualisation

Andrew Sayer criticises the gulf, as he sees it portrayed, between theory and empirical research (1992). Theory and fieldwork are often commonly seen as separate parts of the research process, but Sayer argues that they are in fact closely connected and interrelated. The way he understands this is through the notion of ‘method’, as he puts it, “there is method not only in empirical research, but in theorising too” (p.1).

The ‘method’ in theory, as he sees it, is ‘conceptualisation’, through which decisions are made about the way something - an object, a person, or an idea - is understood. Conceptualisation is important because the way we understand, define and classify an object in research will clearly influence the way that the research is done. However, concepts must not become abstracted from the situation that they are concerned with. ‘Contextualisation’ involves placing the research, issues and concepts, in a broader setting, knowing why the work is being done, where it is being done, with whom and by whom.

Sayer sees the research process as a ‘triangle’ of method, purpose and object, with each being necessary for the research and each having to refer to the other. So, the methods used (both theoretically and empirically) must be appropriate to the object of study and the purpose of the research. Similarly, the object of the research must be appropriate to the purpose of the research and the methods involved. What this is saying is that theory and method are not separate elements in a research project, but are intertwined. The other thing it is saying is that research is not theory driven nor method driven, but rather an equilateral balancing act between purpose, object and method.

However, it is important to concede that this is an ideal situation, which can only really work within the pages of a methodological textbook. Research in reality is a much

messier affair. Although one strives to achieve the 'equilateral balancing act' between the different elements of research, in truth the elements rise and fall in importance through the course of the research, sometimes driving the research, at other times taking a back seat. The reasons for this unevenness are many: the practicalities of fieldwork (such as accessibility and availability), the development of theoretical ideas which rarely goes to plan and the shifting focus of the research as new ideas are born and events external to the research challenge it. While method, purpose and object are indeed the three elements of research, each as important as the others, the way they are held together is more of a web of elastic connections than a triangular balance.

6.2.2 *Changing concepts and ideas*

What does the above discussion mean for the research presented here? This subsection will argue that over the period of the research the three elements of object, purpose and method, as conceived by Sayer, all shifted in meaning and focus. For example, the *object* of the research changed from being disabled people in employment, to people classified as disabled in certain types of employment. The *purpose* of the work shifted from a concern with overall employment and disabled people, to issues of flexibility and disability. And the changes in object and purpose were influenced by, and influenced, the theory and practice as theories of the body, flexible employment and disability identity were discussed and interpreted. Over the period of the research, the complex and uneven interplay between object, purpose and method generated the research that is presented here.

On the changing *conceptualisation* of the three main themes, the research initially assumed that disabled people were an easily defined group with a clear identity. This proved not to be the case. The issue arose in the discussions with the 'key actors' in the first phase of the fieldwork (see 6.3.1) and so in the later phases a substantial part of the interviews with the companies at national and local level was spent on this issue. Additionally, this was a central issue in the final phase of the research, in the interviews with a selection of able-bodied and disabled employees with the companies at local level.

This demonstrates both a development of the research argument and an interplay between method, purpose and object, through a changing conceptualisation.

The research began with a focus on 'flexible employment' as symbolising all of the recent changes in employment in the UK. However, it soon became clear during discussions in the first phase of the empirical work that there were many different understandings of this term and what issues it covered. So, as with disability, it was necessary to change the approach of the work in the later phases. In the second phase - the interviews with the companies at national level (see 6.3.2) - 'flexibility' was concerned with the organisation of work around time and skill. In the fourth phase - the discussions with employees - 'flexibility' was defined by employees themselves, related to their personal experience (see 6.3.4). So, in the translation of the theory into practice we have a much more finely-grained interpretation of what 'flexibility' is, different at different scales and between individual employees, companies and organisations.

The 'body' is more difficult to talk about. Chapter Four argued that theories of the body are very useful for thinking about disability. However, to transfer this thinking into practice, that is, to tackle the issues of the body in the empirical process, is a challenge. Bodies are complex, multi-layered and changing phenomena. To investigate bodies and to relate them to issues of employment and disability is a difficult task. As with flexibility, bodies are talked about differently in different parts of the empirical work. In the first phase, bodies are talked quite abstractly, as collective units, as similar; in the second phase, bodies are talked of as economic units and increasingly as people to be managed; in the fourth phase, people are talking about their experiences of their own bodies. Significantly, no-one ever actually uses the word 'body' or talks explicitly about bodiedness. While they all talk in reference to and through the body, the entity itself is never named.

All three themes of the research - disability, flexibility and the body - involve conceptualisations that developed over the period of the research and were thought about differently in the four phases of the empirical work. It is vital, when transferring research from theory to practice (and back again), to discuss such issues (see 6.2.3 below). Otherwise, the research becomes static and there is no interplay between theory and

empirical work. It is also crucial when conducting research to be aware of the different and changing meanings and understandings of concepts.

Sayer argues that contextualisation is essential because, “concepts should not be abstracted from their use by people in the course of their business as if they exist in a vacuum” (1992, p.59). In this research, there are many contexts to be considered: the changing understandings of disability over the course of the research, most strikingly in the form of the recent Disability Discrimination Act (DDA); the increased use of flexible employment, tempered by a simultaneous improvement of employees rights; the rise in debate of the theory of the ‘body’ by the initially sceptical disability movement as the research progressed. Concepts and their contexts work together to produce the debate that, in this case, exists around disability and flexible employment. The task of research is to ‘get inside’ this arena, understanding concepts, describing contexts and, eventually, building up an understanding of the issues.

6.2.3 Linking theory and empirical practice

The ‘triangle’ of method, object and purpose, as proposed by Sayer (1992), implies that there is a interactional, iterative relationship between theory and empirical work, yet one that is uneven and complex. One of the aims of this chapter is to connect the previous theory chapters to the subsequent empirical analysis. The theory chapters build up a particular set of questions and understandings of the research themes of disability, the body and flexible employment, and it is the task of the empirical chapters to explore these questions and understandings to then feed back into the theoretical understandings. This sub-section will consider three issues: firstly, the main questions and understandings that came out of Chapters Three, Four and Five; secondly, the different methods for tackling these issues (and their strengths and weaknesses); thirdly, how this has worked out in practice in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Chapters Three, Four and Five built up an argument around the relationship between disability and flexible employment. They did so by going to the discursive root, that is, by unpacking the terms ‘disability’ and ‘flexible employment’. And then, subsequently, rebuilding the concepts and debate. Chapter Three argued that the

dominant understanding of disability, as an issue of 'individual pathology', with disabled people understood as individualised, dependent and medically classified, was being challenged by a social understanding that shifted the explanation of disability from individual to society and so made change possible. This debate was very largely played out in the empirical work, with most of the representatives of the organisations and companies showing an understanding of disability that was based on the dominant, individual understanding. Only the more radical disability organisations, some of the charities and the TUC, talked of disability in terms of the social understanding.

Chapter Three concluded by questioning the social model of disability itself, arguing that in its desire to reject the biological determinism of the individual model and focus instead on society, it again left out the positions and experiences of disabled people. Chapter Four developed this critique using the recent theories of the 'body', emphasising the 'materiality' of disability and the importance of 'process' (in other words, the continually changing events and experiences of (re)producing disability and being disabled). While none of the organisations or employers talked explicitly about the 'disabled body', they all talked about the understanding of bodies and the organisation of bodies in the spaces of employment. The interviews with disabled employees also revealed an awareness and centrality of the body to the employment experience.

Chapter Five developed an argument for including the body in the analysis of flexible employment practice, again emphasising process and materiality. In the discussions with employers, flexible employment has certainly raised the issues of the body, the employee as closely wedded to their job and the constantly changing nature of employment, shot through with uncertainty.

The empirical research wanted to explore the issues of disability, the body and employment (and, of course, the interrelations between them), with an emphasis on process and materiality. How was one to do this effectively? There were two main options. Because of the emphasis on the materiality and experience of disability, the focus of the research could be on individual disabled employees, interviewing them about their experiences of employment and their use (and their employer's use) of their bodies in employment. Alternatively, because of their importance in the debate and policy-

making, the research could consider the understandings and policy decisions of organisations and employers. Both approaches tackle the issues of disabled people in employment, but in slightly different ways.

It was decided that the understandings and debates of the organisations and the policy-making and employment practice of the employers would be the focus of the research. The way that disability is understood in the organisations makes a real difference to their policy-making and practice and so to the lives of disabled people. It was important to gain an insight into the way that the organisations operated, developed and implemented policy. In the companies I was interested in all levels of the corporate organisation, how they made and implemented policy and how they understood disability and its relation to employment. Discussions with national and local management revealed much about the way that disability was produced in the companies, how disabled people were understood, organised and supported (it wasn't all negative as might have been expected). And, further, how the materiality of disability mattered in this decision making, in the formation of discourses of disability. The companies element of the research also included interviews with disabled (and able-bodied) employees of the three companies, to both hear their experiences of employment and their understandings of disability, and its relation to employment. These interviews, not as many of which were undertaken as intended (see 6.3.4), revealed issues of employment and disability experience and views of the 'disability identity'. However, they could only ever be one part of the overall research programme. Individual experiences, while clearly of a material nature and revealing much about the bodily nature of employment and disability, have to be set in a broader context of organisational change and decision making. Additionally, the understandings of individuals do not reveal all about disability, through an embodied approach. The views and actions of managers, personnel officers, plus local and national organisations, are just as important in an embodied approach, as they construct and produce the materiality of the body in space.

Thirdly then, in this sub-section, what were the consequences of the decision on methodological approach for the content and argument of Chapters Seven and Eight? Chapter Seven builds up the understanding of disability and employment (and their

relation) in the organisations interviewed at national level. Disability, as Chapter Three explained, is revealed to be a highly complex notion and identity, but one that is dominated by a powerful overall understanding or, as I argue, a 'discursive formation'. In this sense, Chapter Seven is a development and exploration of the themes discussed in Chapter Three. The introduction of the body into the debate in Chapter Seven questions and develops the concept of the discursive formation, revealing the importance of power. Chapter Eight takes the companies as its starting point and explores the nature of the disability-(flexible) employment relation, through interviews with managers, personnel officers and employees. Its perspective is that disability is produced through the spatial workplace and national-local practices of the companies in the organisation of their employment. The companies understanding of disability - reflecting the discussions in Chapter Three - is developed into their policy-making and employment practice - exploring the issues raised in Chapter Five - and, underlying all of this, is an understanding of the body of employees, although this is rarely expressed explicitly. The issues of the bodies of employees, the bodily nature of (flexible) employment, the physical spaces of employment and the employers' interest in the health, capabilities and adaptability of its workforce, are all bodily matters that are discussed in Chapter Four. The interviews with employees reveal other aspects of the bodily nature of employment, and the usefulness of the embodied approach to disability, but the body appears in all areas of the research (the embodied approach was used as an analytical tool in all four phases of the research, the body not only being about individuals, but also about the way that companies organise flexible employment and reproduce disability, amongst other things).

Chapters Seven and Eight open up, discuss and make more complex the debates and issues of the theory chapters. Their role is not to prove the validity of the claims of the theory, but rather to see how the organisations and companies operated in the real world of disability and employment, continually 'working out' the meaning and practice of the disability-employment relation. The body - whether the body as understood by the organisation, employer or employee - was certainly the central feature of these investigations and discussions. The three themes of disability, flexible employment and

the body, developed in the theoretical chapters, were reshaped, challenged and, as a result, made more robust by the process of empirical work.

6.3 How it happened and why

The research focuses on three large companies and the discursive context within which they exist. It is concerned with the structures, processes and understandings, nationally and locally, within which these companies operate and what the interaction between the companies and the socio-economic context means for disabled people in employment. This section will work through the four phases of the empirical work, discussing the context, the methods used, the problems of the process and how the resulting data was analysed and interpreted.

6.3.1 Phase one: the 'key actors'

The companies and the employees within them operate within the context of a debate around disability and employment. This debate takes place amongst employer organisations, employee organisations, charities and disability organisations. Although this debate has no direct influence on the philosophy and policies of the companies, it does have an effect through such things as Government policy which encourages or legislates for companies to act in particular ways, public opinion and public and/or private initiatives. The recent Disability Discrimination Act is the most obvious example, but there are also training schemes, subsidies, joint initiatives by companies and charities/agencies, company involvement in charities and local communities, campaigning by charities and disability political organisations and the media.²² It is clear that issues of disability cut right across the usual boundaries of interest and have complex

²² The story of the Disability Discrimination Act shows the complex way in which these organisations and different media/fora operate: from the beginning, the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill 1994, which was obstructed and defeated by the Government, involved a mixture of arguments from disability organisations, opposition MPs, charities, employers' organisations (with the CBI and the Institute of Directors in opposition and the Employers Forum on Disability in support) and individuals in the form of Nicholas Scott (the Minister for Disabled People at the time) and his daughter, Victoria (a campaigner for the disability charity RADAR) on the front page of the newspapers.

interconnections across the debate. It is also clear that this debate is riven with contradictory understandings of what disability 'is' and what 'should happen' in relation to disability and employment.

To get to grips with this debate, the most important organisations were contacted and interviews arranged with senior figures, usually those involved in the policy debate.²³ There were fourteen interviews in this phase of the research and they were completed in a short period (two months), which was vital for several reasons: to ensure that the political and policy context of the interviews was fairly stable (or, to put it another way, to take a 'snapshot' of the debate), to avoid pre-empting interview patterns and to engage with the debate as it then stood. The interviews centred around the views, understandings and policies of the organisation on disability and flexible employment, understandings of the term 'disability' and linkages and connections with other organisations.

The interviews were all held at the offices of the organisation concerned, for reasons of convenience and to place the interviewees at ease. Most interviews lasted about ninety minutes, with a couple at one hour and one at over two hours. The interview style used was informal, with a series of themes being covered in all of the interviews, but not the exact same questions being asked in each. The questions were adapted prior to each interview and frequently when the interview was in progress, if the respondent wished to talk about a topic they considered relevant and important. This practice of allowing the respondent a degree of control in the interview, was necessary and desirable because the debate over disability and employment (in that period) was the focus of the research and as such a person's (over)emphasis on an issue was of interest. The themes covered in the interviews were: the position and policy on 'flexible' employment; their view on the implications of these employment changes for disabled people; their personal

²³ These interviews took place in March and April 1996. Interviews were held with: Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), the Institute of Directors (IoD), the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Training and Enterprise National Council (TEC), the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), Scope, Mind, Mencap, British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP), RADAR, Employers Forum on Disability (EfD), Outset and Workable.

and organisational understanding of disability and ability; the interlinkages with other organisations and agencies.²⁴

6.3.2 *Phase two: the companies - nationally*

The research was only really going to tackle the issues at the heart of the research question - what the 'implications' of flexible employment have been for disabled people - if the debates and practices within the selected companies were investigated. What were the companies doing in relation to disability, what language were they using, what policies were being developed and which ones put into practice, how were they monitoring what was happening and what impact were Government policies having on them?

On the selection of the companies several issues were taken into account: firstly, because the purpose of the research is to investigate the policies and processes within the companies and their impact on disabled employees, it was important to choose companies that were engaged in the debates and discussions around disability and employment and which had some form of disability policy in place. A company selected at random would not provide a substantial amount of information, or could even result in a company having to defend an undeveloped or non-existent policy on disability. This would have been of little use to the research. Secondly, because the research is a positive piece of work, i.e. it is attempting to understand the processes of disability and employment and develop the debate, it was decided to choose companies which had a positive and, judged by those within the debate (see 6.3.1), a 'good' approach and set of policies. Thirdly, partly because of the previous argument, but also because of the DDA, only large companies were selected. These are much more likely to have positive policies on disability, are covered by the Act and are more likely to be influential in the debate.²⁵

²⁴ Issues that the respondent was unsure about were tried in different ways, but not pushed. The reasoning behind this was that if a person doesn't know or has no opinion on an issue then, although they can be encouraged to think about the issue, an answer or opinion cannot suddenly be generated

²⁵ Employers with fewer than 20 employees are not covered by the DDA. Additionally, because of the conditions of 'reasonable adjustment', it is widely assumed that it is large companies that will be expected to comply, because they are more capable, financially and organisationally, of doing so.

The companies were accessed through the 'Employers Forum on Disability', the employers organisation that promotes and monitors disability and employment issues from a business angle. Membership of this organisation also indicates a desire to be involved in the debate around disability and employment.

This approach to the research could be criticised as biased, because it is selecting companies on the basis of a 'good' and developed set of policies. Would a random sample of companies give one a better picture of what was happening in UK employment? Well, the research is not concerned with assessing the quality and success, or otherwise, of companies' policies on disability and employment. Rather, it is interested in the processes and structures of employment for disabled people within the companies.

Three private companies were chosen to reflect different parts of the UK service economy. The approach chosen for the research in the companies - in-depth interviews with managers, personnel officers and employees - could never be truly representative (an issue which has always dogged small scale research (Bryman, 1988)). As explained above, the companies were chosen because they had a number of qualities that the research was interested in, hence they were not attempting to be representative. Within this, however, the three companies chosen (three to give a selection of circumstances) covered significant parts of the service sector (chosen because this is where most disabled people are employed *and* where flexible employment practices are most widely and intensely used - see Chapter Five) and involved a significant number of people with important views. As Bryman argues, it is wrong to consider case study qualitative research as not achieving 'representation', because, firstly, this assumes that the case study is being selected from a population of similar cases, when this is never the situation, especially when spatial selection is involved (i.e. Manchester is, of course, going to be different to another place - see next sub-section). Secondly, the theoretical context must define how the empirical research is done, that is, the question should be whether the empirical approach is representative of the theoretical understanding, rather than the wider population. With the present research, the case studies of three service sector companies will reveal the processes and practices of employment that the theoretical case developed in earlier chapter is interested in. This again raises the issue of

the relationship between theory and empirical work considered in section 6.2 - the theoretical concepts will be challenged and reshaped by the process of the empirical work, which is all to the advantage of the research as a whole. It is the exchange of ideas between the theoretical and the empirical, admittedly an unclear and never easy process, that keeps research moving forward.

The three companies - a banking company, a communications company and a media company - all employ large numbers of people in many different areas of work and draw from different parts of the labour market, all are known to adopt flexible working practices and all have relatively sophisticated disability policies. The interviews - two with each company, one in London and one in Manchester - covered the structures and processes of disability and employment policy-making within the company, approaches to, and understandings of, disability, the possible implications of changing employment practices for disabled employees and, due to the timing of the interviews (just before the DDA was enacted), the possible implications of the new legislation. Interviews were arranged with senior personnel or equal opportunities representatives at the companies' headquarters (all in London for this phase of the research) and took place over a two day period in October 1996. The national representatives were as follows: for the banking company, a senior equal opportunities manager; for the communications company, a senior equal opportunities manager; for the media company, a senior human resources manager. As with the 'key actor' interviews it was important to interview the companies in the same period to ensure a similar policy and political context. The interviews were again informal, with a set of themes covered in the hour or so with each interviewee. Company documentation, either obtained beforehand or supplied at the interview, also provided a focus for the interviews.

The interviews covered the following themes: the structure of the company and the position of the equal opportunities unit and disability within that; how decisions are made and who makes them; the key disability and other equal opportunity policy initiatives operated by the company, how these operate, are monitored and so on; how the company defines disability and the policy implications of this; the level and type of flexible working within the company and who is involved in this; the respondent's views

on the implications of flexible working for disabled people; and their expectations of the DDA.²⁶

6.3.3 *Phase three: the organisations and companies in the local*

The first two phases of the empirical work involved a national debate and, although the companies are internationally and nationally oriented, they are, of course, located in the local. All three selected companies have their UK headquarters in London and branches across the UK. They have distinct organisational structures and these have a strong influence on their policy-making and employment practices. The banking company is based in large branch operations, with an increasing number of telephone and processing centres; the communications company is a regionally-based operation, with large call centres and high street retail outlets; the media company is regionally-based, with six main centres outside London and many local radio stations, but all are part of a strong corporate structure (see 8.2). In terms of numbers of employees nationally and locally, the banking company nationally has just over 43,000 employees and in the Manchester branch studied, approximately 60 employees; the same numbers for the communications company are 130,000 nationally and 200 locally; and for the media company 3,700 (in production) nationally and 300 locally (in production and administration).²⁷

The differing organisational structures is one reason to look at the companies in the local area. Another strong reason is to see what influence the locale has on the operations of the company. A traditional geographical investigation would compare two cities, say Manchester and Liverpool, to see if and how the companies worked differently

²⁶ At the time of the interviews all of the companies were preparing themselves and their managers across the company for the introduction of the employment section of the DDA (on 2nd December 1996) and as a consequence the interview was strongly coloured by this concern and interest. The other side of this is that the introduction of the DDA has made the selected companies very aware of disability and their disabled employees.

²⁷ All three companies were at the time of the research undergoing significant restructuring, which included 'downsizing', also known as the significant reduction in staff numbers. The numbers quoted are therefore approximate.

in these two places. However, there is a fundamental weakness in this approach: it proves itself right, because *of course* the situation and events will be different in the two places, due to the fact that they are different places, with different economies, social structures and histories. For this research the decision was made to look at one place and explore how national policies and processes - of the companies and the organisations - were interpreted in a locality, that is, how they were 'filtered' by the structures and organisations of the area. This approach draws on the work of Peck (1992; 1996), who argues that 'unpacking' a local labour market will reveal a complex pattern of power relations and contested socio-economic spaces, involving not just employers, but different groups of employees and a whole range of social and political forces. So far from labour markets being 'empty' spaces of rational economic decision-making, they are social places where ideas, people, and cultural, social and political processes interact. In the present research, the three companies are operating their national policies in a local environment and will have to adapt to that area. The policy context discussed in the first phase will also have a local interpretation, including, importantly, a local 'take' on disability.

Of course, this particular blend of people and processes will not be the same in other local areas where these companies operate, but there was never any intention of trying to generalise from this one case study across the country. Instead, what the research aims to show is that it is the *approach* that is important. That is, that national processes are understood and put into practice differently in different places, in other words, space and place matter. The other key point that Peck makes is that these interactions in the local labour market are never 'friendly agreements', with the different sides coming to a compromise and nor do companies have the most powerful say. Rather, there is a continuous struggle over labour market processes and outcomes, over who's included and excluded, between companies, social institutions and people, in a labour market that is structured, not a free market free-for-all.

In the selection of the local labour market area, there were two main criteria: firstly, it had to be a place where the three companies had a significant operation; and secondly, it had to have an active and interesting disability policy arena, including a

progressive local authority. On the basis of these criteria Manchester, and specifically the local authority area of the City of Manchester, was chosen. Manchester had the additional advantage of being a place that I knew from previous research and a place where I had support and contacts, particularly in the form of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies.²⁸

Such an approach, selecting only one labour market to study, could be criticised as being too 'complete', too 'self-selected', so that any findings are those which the researcher expected, so not reflecting the 'true' situation of disability and employment. The response to this criticism is that, like the companies, the labour market was not chosen to be somehow representative of labour markets across the UK. It is not possible for one place to tell the stories of every place, and as long as no general claims are made then this approach is both legitimate and productive. Rather, what is being searched for is a possible theory that can be applied to other places. Another criticism is that a critical analysis cannot take place if one chooses only to look at where the situation is progressive, i.e. in Manchester where there is a positive local authority and active disability organisations. There are two responses to this: firstly, there is no simple story to a locality, that is, although Manchester could appear to be a role model of disability debate, it is a rather more complex situation and to make judgements about what is 'good' or 'bad' is not only impossible, but misguided. Secondly, there is no point in searching for the negative. There is no doubt that disabled people are disadvantaged in employment, but there is no need to prove this again. It is more important, I argue, to explore and understand how national companies and local contexts interact and what this means for the employment positions and experiences of disabled people. This may be good or bad, but that is not the crucial point, what happens and how it happens is much more important, because only when we understand this will any sense of what can be done to make things better emerge.

²⁸ The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) is the local authority and trade union 'think-tank', doing research and providing advice on employment, economic development and social issues. CLES provided assistance, advice and contacts for this research.

In the interviews with the three companies in Manchester I wanted to discover how the local operation fitted into the national structure of the companies and how this impacted on policy-making processes and decisions. I wanted to find out about policy initiatives by the company in the local labour market in relation to disability and employment and, lastly, I wanted to find out what connections and structures the company was involved in (if any) in the local area - who did they talk to, who did they operate joint initiatives with, were they embedded in the local area or not? I was also interested in the position and role of the individual I spoke to in the company and their views and experiences.²⁹ This gave the research an additional and important angle, as policies on disability are not implemented with machine-like efficiency, they are interpreted by managers who understand them in a way that reflects their own position and experiences. So, although the research did not have the time to interview every manager involved in this particular set of policies in the three companies, the detailed interview with this one person (in a crucial position) that included an understanding of their own view and perception of disability and employment, gave a supposedly objective policy process its actual (uneven) human interpretation.

As mentioned above, the position and possible importance of the local labour market in providing the context for the policy process of the three companies was an integral part of the research. To understand this context, the key organisations in the local labour market area were interviewed.³⁰ These organisations were asked about their activities and policy-making in the Manchester area, their views on issues of disability and employment, the level and type of contacts with the companies in the area and their understanding of the Manchester labour market. The policies and practices of the selected

²⁹ In Manchester, interviews were conducted with one representative of each company, as follows: for the banking company, the manager of the main branch; for the communications company, the head of equal opportunities; for the media company, the head of human resources.

³⁰ The local organisations (and their representatives) interviewed were: the local authority Manchester City Council (equal opportunities manager), the Training and Enterprise Council (the equal opportunities manager); the Employment Service (representative of the PACT); and the umbrella organisation of disability organisations, Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People (main organiser).

companies in Manchester could then be interpreted to see how they interconnect and interrelate with the local socio-economic context.

6.3.4 Phase four: the employees

The final phase of the fieldwork involved interviews with a selection of employees from the three companies. Small numbers (ten was the intended number in each company) were decided upon so that adequate time could be spent with each employee to cover the full range of topics. Focus groups, which would have enabled a larger number of interviewees, were not used because it was the individual employees' positions and experiences that were of interest. The research, by the time this stage had been reached, had moved into questions of the boundaries between ability and disability, as well as considering the bodily involvement of the employee in their work. These two issues were reflected in the make-up of the groups interviewed, that is, a mixture of able-bodied and disabled employees. The interviews had three purposes: to find out whether, and if so how, the employees' jobs were being changed as flexible employment practices were used more widely; to discover how the employees used their bodies in their employment; and how their bodies and work influenced the way they felt about themselves and their identity as an 'able-bodied' or 'disabled' person.

However, several issues arose in this part of the research. Firstly, on access, while the three companies were all very positive about allowing their employees to be interviewed, for organisational reasons it was not possible to get as many interviewees as was intended (six in each company instead of ten). These numbers are certainly small, when we consider the total number of employees in the local operations (see above), but their views and experiences are important and interesting and add much to the research (it is the way that they are combined with the other elements of the fieldwork that is important, not their individual role). Secondly, and relatedly, there were insufficient numbers of disabled employees in the companies to achieve the desired able-bodied-disabled balance. In the banking company, for example, while there were three disabled employees when the initial contact interview took place, by the time the employee interviews were arranged all three had left the company. So all six interviews in this

company were with able-bodied employees. In summary, the employee numbers and mix for the three companies were as follows: the banking company - 6 able-bodied employees; the communications company - 3 able-bodied and 3 disabled employees; the media company - 5 able-bodied, 1 disabled. The employees roles in the banking company were a personnel manager, two cashiers, a loans manager, a 'front of house' supervisor and an administrator. In the communication company, the employees were a personnel manager, an engineering services operator, a typist, an administrator, a sales manager and a clerical assistant. Finally, in the media company, three of the employees were involved in production as assistants and a manager, one was a cameraman, one a clerical assistant and the last a finance officer. The employees were interviewed individually for about 30 minutes each and were questioned on their job, the times and skills used in their work, whether this had changed and their understanding of themselves as able-bodied or disabled.³¹ Thirdly, while the issue of the ability-disability divide is one that runs right through the research, the concept of 'ability', because it is assumed and not thought about, made little sense to the employees interviewed. It was the concept of 'disability' that they all had a fairly clear interpretation of and which dominated the interview. In this sense, ability is understood simply as what disability is not.

6.3.5 Issues of analysis and interpretation

The employment of qualitative research techniques in this study, primarily semi-structured interviews, has many advantages. The description and questioning of the organisations, the companies, the employees and the national and local spaces and networks within which these actors operate and interact, produces a rich source of data which potentially can provide an understanding of how the disability-flexible employment relation.

However, once all this rich data is gathered, and indeed during its collection, there is a need to both analyse and interpret what has been discovered. The very nature of the qualitative technique used here - the semi-structured interview - means that the process of

³¹ The figures do not distinguish between able-bodied and disabled employees. In this research, it is the experience of, and position in, employment that is important, rather than the job title.

analysis is not straightforward. The allowance, indeed encouragement, that is made for the interviewee to partly determine the subjects covered means that while good data is produced, that allows one a better insight into the issue, this data can be outside the bounds of the original question.

The above suggests that there are perhaps four key processes in qualitative research: description, questioning, analysis and interpretation. As 6.2 argued, there are elements of theory and empirical work or 'method' in all four processes, as the concepts are developed, discussed and 'tested out' in the different contexts. This sub-section will consider in particular the latter two of the processes, the first two already having been covered in 6.3. The discussion that follows will consider both the techniques of analysis and interpretation used in this research and the broader issues of representation and subjectivity.

Analysis Prior to the interviews, materials relating to the organisations and companies, as well as the debate more broadly, were collected. The documents, including organisation statements and reports, company public relations materials and annual reports, were studied and a description of the organisations' and companies' structures and policies was built up. This chapter has already argued for the importance of description in 'setting up' the conducting and analysis of the interviews which follow. Description not only establishes the context of the debate, but also provides very important and clear information on the priorities and understandings of the organisation or company being represented. The concepts being developed in Chapters Three, Four and Five were used to think through the 'stories' being presented in the documentary materials. When the interviews were undertaken these sets of descriptions and contexts helped to identify issues and understandings (and also the way ideas and policies are represented and how they work in practice).

The interviews themselves were recorded on audio-tape (with the understanding that no quotes would be attributed to a named individual, only the organisation they represented), were fully transcribed and then typed up onto sheets with wide margins allowing for notes to be made. Each interview was then read several times: firstly, to

identify any clear themes and issues, and any particular elements such as knowledge of, or interest in, a particular area; secondly, with the documentary and other relevant descriptive materials (such as newspaper articles) alongside, to make connections between the documentary materials and interview data and to locate the interview, in terms of issues and temporality, in the wider debate; thirdly, to note links and references to other organisations, individuals and companies. From this third part a 'map' of networks was sketched out to aid the understanding of the structure of the debate.

At this point, particular themes began to emerge from the data, some of which had been identified in the theoretical considerations (Chapters Three to Five), others solely from the data (which then fed back into the theoretical debates). To tackle and understand these themes and to begin to make links between the organisations and companies (in phases 1 and 2), large matrices were drawn up for each organisation and company, with a series of themes each with a column. The themes for the organisations were 'function of organisation', 'meaning of disability', 'disability and employment', 'flexible employment', 'the DDA' and 'general'. The themes for the companies were 'organisation', 'policy', 'monitoring', 'definition of disability', 'flexibility and work', 'the DDA' and 'the national-local relationship'.

In the columns, for each theme, the interviews would be broken down, placing the description, notes, comments and quotes in that column. When all of the organisation interviews had been analysed in this way, the themes were compared and contrasted and notes taken on what issues were emerging, common areas and objects of difference and debate. This was also done for the company interviews at national level.

The analysis of the Manchester labour market (from data collected in 6.3.3) involved the transcription, reading and thematic analysis of the local company and organisation interviews, with the additional information from the employment data and information supplied by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies. A network 'map', similar to that produced for the national level organisations, was constructed for the Manchester labour market to note such things as interconnections between the organisations and spatial processes between the companies' national and local operations.

The employee interviews were rather different, in so much as they dealt with different topics, although similar themes, to the previous interviews and that those being interviewed were individuals, not representing an organisation or company, only themselves, and were not accustomed to talking about themselves in such a way or the issues involved (see 6.4). These interview transcripts were treated more as a whole, partly because they were shorter, but more importantly because they were less structured and very personal, so had to be treated 'in the round' and on their own terms.

Interpretation The analysis of the documentary and interview material described above must then move into the fourth element of the qualitative research approach, that is, interpretation. It is only at this stage that the collected and analysed material is made sense of and connected back into the theoretical issues and debates that underpin the research.

Bryman (1988) argues that the key aspect of qualitative research is 'seeing through the subject's eyes', that is, viewing the actions and events of the research issue from the perspective of the people and organisations being studied. The aim of the researcher must be to describe and represent the social world of the debate/issue in a way that reflects the interests and agenda of the participants. The faithful portrayal of the research subject may sound like the objective of all research, but it is the desire to simultaneously let the subjects speak *and* get close to them that makes qualitative research so different from quantitative research which constructs categories of people and issues and attempts to keep an objective distance from its subjects.

How is such interpretative qualitative research to be done? There are many issues raised by such an open and unstructured approach, primarily those of the use(s) of data and generalisation. On the first issue, put simply, is it possible to see through another's eyes? And does this imply that the researcher has no agenda? It is, of course, impossible to see a situation exactly from another's point of view and, of course, every researcher has a political or theoretical agenda when they undertake research. However, this does not prohibit the qualitative researcher from attempting to understand and represent the subjects. It is just that no claims should be made for absolute knowledge or

generalisation. The qualitative method is fundamentally sound, it just needs to be used and represented appropriately.

In the research undertaken here, the interpretation of the empirical findings and analysis described above, was as follows: the policy and thematic agenda on the commencement of the research were fairly clear, that is, to describe and understand the implications of flexible employment practices for disabled people and to unpack the notions of 'disability' and 'flexibility' through the theory of the 'body'. These *a priori* conceptualisations framed the way that the research represented and understood the interviews and documentary material. And this ran right through the analytical process, in the selection of questions and themes and in the writing-up. So, with the interviews with the 'key actors', there were a number of issues I knew would come up and/or which I saw as important, such as the meaning of disability and the impact of the DDA. Questions on these issues were asked in the interviews, in the initial 'reading' analysis (see above) these issues were looked for and in the 'themed' analysis such issues were allocated a column each. It is clear that as a researcher I had a number of agenda operating during the research process, and I made these clear in both theoretical and empirical chapters. However, there is so much more to qualitative analysis, so much that emerges that one does not expect. For example, in the interviews with employees (in phase four), there was a set of issues going into the interviews such as the able/disabled binary and the use of the body in employment. Although these issues were evident in the transcript they were displaced by other issues, such as job insecurity, that had not been expected. The interpretation of this was important. The employee interviews did not disrupt the whole theoretical agenda of the thesis, but they certainly demanded that the interpretation reflected this empirical evidence (and fed it back into the theoretical discussion).

There is one issue in particular in qualitative research that is a constant concern for those both supportive towards and critical of such research techniques: the use of quotations. Bryman (1988) argues that there is a "tendency towards an anecdotal approach to the use of 'data' in relation to explanations in qualitative research [in that] brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews, or examples of a particular activity are used to provide evidence for a particular contention" (p.77). Because the

reader of the research output rarely gets to see the whole transcripts of interviews, to make alternative judgements and interpretations is difficult. It is essential for qualitative research to tackle this issue effectively . Quotations must be referenced, placed in context and not accorded undue privilege.

Quotations formed a central part of the presentation of the research findings in Chapters Seven and Eight. In the 'themed' analysis (discussed above) quotations were selected in larger chunks if a certain theme was raised in them. When it came to the writing of the research the themes were grouped, cross-referenced and discussed, and the quotations were always part of this process. In the writing-up process the quotations were grouped with quotes from other organisations (in Chapter Seven) to represent and discuss a certain theme in the debate. The whole range of quotations was used, with all angles of the debate represented; there was never a case of quotations being excluded because they contradicted an argument. So it can be argued that the quotations are a central part of the research presentation and the selection and placing of the quotations was an integral part of the whole interpretation of the materials and issues involved.

There is also the issue of whether the quotation used 'represents' the overall view or is a lone voice. As the above parts of 6.3 have shown, similar (although non-identical) questions were asked in each set of interviews (i.e. organisations, national companies, local companies, local organisations and employees) and responses were received for each. So, even if there is only one voice shown in the quotation, the others had an opportunity to answer it. The quote used, then, is not out of the ordinary or a lone voice. There were certain issues, of course, that were raised by a single interviewee and accordingly these were made plain in the text of Chapters Seven and Eight.

6.4 Researching disability: ethics and positionality

The third theme of this chapter is the politics of research. Increasingly in social science and geography, researchers are becoming aware of the inevitable connections between themselves and their work. In researching disability, a relatively new area of geography, many of the familiar issues around researching the 'other' arise. This

subsection will discuss the twin issues of ethics and positionality in research, considering the overall debate and their role in the present research.

6.3.1 Researching disability and ethics

Research is not a passive activity, it involves interactions with people and communities, and there will inevitably be consequences. Connected to this, when researching a topic that is part of social debate it is important that one is aware of the views of those who are at the centre of that debate. In the present research it was crucial that I knew what disabled people and their representative organisations thought about research into issues of disability. Amongst disabled people there has been a strong reaction to academic research in the past 10 years. Abberley (1991) criticised the Government disability surveys of the 1980s (see Chapter One) as alienating and producing little for disabled people. Some disabled academics and activists have as a result advised disabled people not to take part in research (Finkelstein, 1985). There is a suspicion of academics and indeed all researchers by many disabled people: what is the moral and political standpoint and agenda of the researcher, and what does the research add to the campaign for social equality? It is important for all researchers doing work on disability to consider these questions before they begin and to be honest to the subjects of the research about what they are trying to do. I attempted to make it plain to the disability organisations and disabled people interviewed, that I supported the right of disabled people to have equal access to employment, but made it equally clear that the aim of the research was to understand the discourses of disability and employment in the selected organisations and companies, rather than to evaluate them.

What emerges from the above discussion is a strong sense of the importance of establishing and maintaining a clear ethical position in relation to research on disability. That is, throughout the research process it is crucial for the researcher to be aware of the complexities and potential contradictions of the research method and to respond fully and effectively to any criticism. In this way, research into disability is no different to research into any other social issue. The same conflicts and contradictions, problems of access, representation and interpretation arise, and the researcher must respond to these in an

open and balanced way. If not, the research will lose its credibility and the potential subjects could withdraw their support.

Although the above relates directly to the disabled people interviewed for the research, issues of research ethics arose in all four phases of the empirical work. In the interviews with the 'key actors' in the organisations (including disability organisations) in phase one, the research had to consider how representative the person was that was interviewed, that is, did they speak for a particular part of the organisation. Also, did they have personal experiences that might influence the discussion, for example, one of the organisation representatives had an impairment themselves. Understanding the personal stories, as well as the 'official' views being expressed, is important in getting to the heart of the issues being discussed. This leads me into another matter, that runs right through the research, that is, confidentiality. It was vital for maintaining the integrity of the research to protect the identities of all those interviewed, not only to allow them to speak freely, but also to respect their privacy. For example, the representative of the organisation who told me he was disabled (see above) had a non-visible impairment, and I did not know who else knew.

When interviewing the employers, some different issues arose. The issue of the representativeness of the person was again important, and the 'placing' of that person within the structure of the company was necessary to 'locate' their views. However, perhaps more so this time, the matter of power arose, that is, the power and influence of the person and the company over employment and disability. In the interviews with the organisations it always seemed that they were *reacting* to the actions of companies such as the ones I was talking to. The companies largely call the shots (this has been tempered slightly by the introduction of the DDA) and they know this. In the discussions with the companies I had to present an unmade agenda to them, be open to their views, but also attempt to get to the heart of their views and actions on disability. Such company representatives are very used to talking to people from outside and so one is in danger of receiving the public relations 'line' on an issue. Pressing them to think about the issues of disability and employment without forcing them onto the defensive was a difficult path to tread. There was also the issue of whether I told the employers which organisations I had

been speaking to. I decided against telling them, so as not to restrict the discussion, only *answering if asked directly (and never revealing names)*.

When talking to the organisations and companies in the local area, there is the obvious issue of connections between the national and local parts. How much should one tell the local company what the national one had said? It was important that I only referred to national policy initiatives in the local interviews, not matters of opinion. This was for two reasons, firstly, to allow the research to see how national ideas were working out locally and, secondly, not to make the interviewee feel restricted in what they wanted to say. In the local area study there was also the issue of whether the balance was right between the different organisations talked to, that is, was the debate in the area being fairly represented or were certain voices, because of their vociferousness, being allowed to dominate? I can only argue that thorough cross-checking between the different organisations attempted to allow all opinions to be expressed equally.

Lastly, in phase four, I spoke to the employees, both disabled and able-bodied. This was perhaps the part of the research that presented most issues of ethical concern. Setting up and conducting interviews with individuals, rather than organisations, always makes the research process more complex and delicate, because one is not dealing with a representative of a group, who is, although of course an individual (see above), within the group and in a way 'protected' by it. Individuals, because they are talking about themselves, necessarily feel more 'exposed' and sensitive. Assuring confidentiality is even more important here, but there is the additional issue of asking people personal questions, especially about something as private as their bodies, health and identities. I ensured that in the interviews I was very sensitive to the subject's concerns about the research and about talking about themselves. I also did not ask personal questions, instead letting the interviewee speak about this only if they raised it. There were several occasions when this happened and it was not always easy; for example, when one interviewee became extremely upset telling his story, as soon as he had finished I stopped the interview.

The interviews with employees were set up by the local company managers I interviewed in phase three. This was very helpful of them, but there were also issues

related to this, particularly because I wanted to talk to a mix of able-bodied and disabled employees. Firstly, in leaving it to the manager to select the interviewees, I was handing over the responsibility in terms of deciding what a 'disability' was and who he or she thought I should talk to (were those with less favourable views of the company not going to be selected?). Secondly, when they came to talk to me, the subjects knew that they had been selected for that reason and so the agenda, in their eyes, had been clearly set before the interview had begun. The issue of a person knowing they are there because they are disabled (or not, as defined by their manager) was a difficult one for the interviews. The only way to deal with it was to ensure that the full range of issues was discussed so that the perceived limited focus on disability was dispelled.

Throughout the four phases of the empirical work, there was the issue of my own position on disability. In the first part of this subsection, I explained that in the discussion with disability organisations and disabled people I made it clear that while I supported disability equality in employment, I was more interested in understanding how the relationship between disability and employment was produced and reproduced, than in making a political judgement of it. Indeed, I made this plain to *all* of the people and organisations I talked to. I had no agenda and was always a researcher first and foremost.

There have been moves within the disability research community to challenge this position and instead politicise research through a so-called 'emancipatory' approach. This involves the 'empowering' of the research subject, in this case disabled people, by handing them much of the power in determining and carrying out the research (Oliver *et al*, 1992). This approach is now being actively pursued by several geographers doing disability research (for example, Kitchen, 1996) and involves consulting disabled people during all stages of the research, and their involvement in the fieldwork. The writing of the research is checked and edited by the disabled 'advisers' and ownership of the work is passed to them. One key claim of emancipatory work is that it blurs the distinction between researcher and researched and weakens the myth of the academic as 'expert'. The research in this method clearly has an agenda, and the people doing the work are both political activist and researcher. This changes the nature of research quite

dramatically as it assumes particular understandings, methods and theories at the start and places political issues at the heart of the research.

Several comments are useful here in relation to the present research. Firstly, I cannot claim to have used an emancipatory research method in the thesis. I did talk to several key people in the disability debate about the research issues and was certainly influenced by them, but the idea for the research was mine. In fact, the issue of flexibility and disability was criticised by some disabled activists I talked to as 'unimportant'. So, although a researcher must be sensitive to the political and social debates around the issue, they need not be driven by these. Secondly, while I certainly agree that most of the research on disability in the past has been heavily reliant on scientific methods of data collection which have been both inappropriate and offensive, there are dangers too in the emancipatory method. For example, who are the disabled people who act as the advisers, how do you choose them and what happens if there are significant disagreements over approach and content? And by using disabled people as researchers and advisers, the researcher could be accused of exploitation. Thirdly, by allying oneself so heavily with disabled organisations and disabled people, will the researcher find that certain theories and conclusions are not acceptable? In this research, I wanted to critique both the medical *and* social models of disability (see Chapter Three), but with the social model so closely associated with the disability movement this may have been difficult if I had used an emancipatory approach.

The main thing to be recognised, I would argue, is that the researcher is the one in control of the work and the one who will benefit mostly from the work, whatever the approach used. The emancipatory approach should not be used as a way of avoiding these responsibilities. In the present research I decided on the focus of the research and I accept full responsibility for its outcomes. The views of the disabled people (and able-bodied too) that I met during the course of the research influenced the work tremendously. The approach I used - semi-structured interviews with all those in the debate, from employees to company managers, disability campaigners to the business organisations - allowed all views to be heard and made sure that a relationship of sorts was built up with the interviewees. Essentially, then, the researcher must be centrally concerned with the

research and must act in an ethical and responsible way in achieving this. It is not easy, of course, to achieve this balance, and the researcher must be open about the methods being used and always willing to justify the approach. Allying oneself to one particular group and so politicising the research is an avenue fraught with problems, most notably that the researcher must not overestimate their ability to make a difference (Hammersley, 1995).

6.3.2 *Positionality: relationships with the research*

Closely linked to the above is the issue of how one relates to the research. It is clear that if one has initiated the research through a concern for social justice, then one will have thought through the approach to the work which recognises the complex ethical issues involved. It is obvious that such an approach cannot claim to be 'objective' or 'scientific', in fact, this is expressly not the intention. Rather, this is research that is affected by the interests, opinions and personality of the researcher and the interactions with the people they are studying, in other words, the politics of positionality.

There are several issues around positionality that are important in the present research. Firstly, the relation that I had with the people being researched, that is, the organisation and company representatives and the employees (able-bodied and disabled). The research used qualitative methods, involving semi-structured interviews and asked questions that concerned views and ideas, but also opinions and emotions. I attempted to build up a relationship between myself and the person being interviewed - even if the interview only lasted an hour or so - so that trust could be established and information, rather than being simply collected by me, was exchanged. So, in the interviews I tried to give a little bit of information about myself and the work I was doing to put the subject at ease and to show that I was interested in understanding not making judgements. The 'emancipatory' research method discussed above is one way of trying to break down the barriers between the researcher and those being researched. There is, however, another altogether more powerful way of thinking about this: the binary of the researcher and researched is a false one as it creates a division between people who are part of the same society and operate in similar moral and social contexts. In the present research, it could be argued that, although I am defined as an able-bodied academic, I am, firstly, an

embodied person and, secondly, I am involved in employment myself. However, if we are to accept this argument then we must also accept that researchers are subject to the same weaknesses and constraints as anyone else and the research must acknowledge this (Hammersley, 1995). It is also important to recognise that power is involved in all research relationships. When I interviewed the representatives of the organisations and the companies, I was, or felt I was, in a position of relative weakness and when I interviewed the employees I felt in a position of relative power. But perhaps this is a limited way of looking at the issue. Instead, perhaps the power relations are highly variable between people, whatever their position, and it is an approach of respect and openness that is needed for research to succeed.

Secondly, the issue of reflexivity. One must be aware of one's relationship to the subject matter because the way one places oneself in the research is vital, as it shapes the process and the outcome. There has been a significant debate in the disability literature about the role of able-bodied researchers in disability research. Some able-bodied researchers, very aware of their perceived bodily state and the politics of research, have attempted to justify their involvement (Drake, 1998), but have mostly been rebutted by disabled academics (Branfield, 1998); one has even drawn up 'rules of engagement' for doing disability research (Shakespeare, 1996b). Although I would be defined as an able-bodied person by any test of 'disability', I am an embodied person who experiences bodily (meaning mind and body) inadequacies and failings. But, more importantly, I take research into disability seriously and, further, feel that such rules about who and how research is done could restrict what issues are tackled. As the research has progressed I have built up an understanding of disability that goes beyond the confines of the able-disabled divide. Disability is something that is changeable, about many things and experienced in many ways by many different people. Understanding the issues is more important than drawing boundaries.

As important, and perhaps this is the true meaning of being self-reflexive, is the understanding of what impact the research process may have on people, organisations and situations involved (Charlesworth, 1994). This impact can be positive or negative, it can give the person or organisation an opportunity to reflect, or it can make the respondent

feel unhappy about their lives, or the organisation to become defensive about its actions. The key point is that research is not a passive process, it does have effects. Although I would not claim that my research made any significant impact, I consider that by asking questions in all phases of the research I made people think and consider their views and policies. On a less positive note, the interviewee who became upset in an interview (referred to above) was probably not pleased that I had raised difficult issues.

Thirdly, the politics of research, personal and social. Research is a process laden with the baggage of personality, relationships, opinion and emotion. What does this mean for researchers and for this present research? I contend that research is at the same time a deeply personal matter - for research to work the idea and drive must come from inside you and the process of fieldwork and writing-up is an intensely personal experience - and a strongly social matter - often you are being funded by the state and are tackling an issue of social significance. It is the welding together of these two processes that is the key to research. It is, or should be if it is to work, a personal and social journey through the stormy and largely uncharted waters of politics and justice. For the present research, I felt at the start that I wanted to contribute to the political project of equality for disabled people in employment, but after unpacking the notions of 'disability' and 'employment', I became less sure of this. The reality made the politics seem simplistic and not really getting at the heart of the matter. Tackling the issue of the production of meanings was what was important.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the empirical methods involved in the research. Throughout, the chapter has emphasised that theory and empirical work, so often seen as two separate processes, are in fact two parts of the same process, that of 'method'. The research, as it developed over the three year period, was a continuing interaction between the ideas of theory and the practice of empirical work. Sayer described this as a 'triangle', with method (theory and practice), object and purpose being at the three corners. The research needed all three to operate: an effective relationship between theory and practice, an understanding of the objects to be studied and a driving force of purpose

behind it. The chapter also noted, however, that putting into action such an approach is difficult.

The chapter described how this 'triangle' of the research process operated in this research. The empirical methods used fed off the theory and vice versa throughout the thesis, the object of the research - disabled people in employment - developed and the purpose - which the final section discussed - was one of personal and social politics.

What the chapter attempted to show was that research is a complex process that involves oneself, as well as the skills of the researcher. It showed that research on disability is difficult and demands awareness and personal involvement. And it showed that the interaction between the different levels of the research was crucial to the understanding of the research issue.

Chapter Seven Understandings of disability and flexible employment in the organisations

7.1 Introduction

The challenge now is to put the methodological approach, as set out in Chapter Six, into practice. The discussion will take place over two chapters, the present one and Chapter Eight. The present chapter considers the way that disability and employment and, in particular, flexible employment, are understood and represented by the ‘organisations’ at national level. These organisations can be divided into three groups: firstly, disability organisations, such as charities and campaigning groups; secondly, employment organisations, including employer and employee bodies; and thirdly, organisations that attempt to practically connect disabled people and employment. These three groups of organisations encompass the wide range of understandings of disability and employment. However, the chapter argues that there is a powerful *discursive formation* around the understanding of disability and employment, namely the fundamental ‘impossibility’ of the two concepts. In other words, amongst the three groups of organisations there is an assumption that disability and employment are incompatible. As with any discursive formation, there are challenges to the understanding, but the debate is always couched in terms of this fundamental understanding.

The chapter then argues that an *embodied* approach to the discursive formation around disability and employment can serve to deconstruct the dominant understanding of disability and employment as ‘mutually impossible’. The theory of the ‘body’, as developed in Chapter Four, allows one to consider the complex and constantly changing relationship between disabled people and employment, a relationship that involves the bodies and the embodied practice of disabled employees. It is the approach developed in Chapters Four and Five, that of disability and employment as *process*, that will be applied in this chapter on the organisations. By process is implied continual change and the renegotiation of meanings and identities. The very nature of the body and of flexible employment as constantly changing phenomena means that *process* is a useful way of understanding the relationship between disability and employment.

Chapter Eight takes this discussion further through a discussion of the understandings and actions of the three companies in relation to their disabled employees and disability in general. It is the way that the relationship between disability and employment is understood and produced spatially, however, which lies at the heart of this second chapter on the empirical work.

This chapter is in five sections. Chapter Six argued that the context in which the research takes place is vital to its analysis and so, firstly, the important contexts, from legislative to personal, will be discussed. Secondly, the proposed discursive formation around disability and employment will be developed, using evidence from the interviews with organisations. Importantly, the discursive formation is then considered using an embodied approach in an attempt to deconstruct this powerful discourse. In the third section, the issue of employment is focused on ‘flexible’ employment, in an attempt to ‘open up’ the possible discursive formation on disability and employment. Returning to matters of context, section four considers how Government policy, in particular the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), adds to the debate around disability and employment in the organisations. Lastly, the more fundamental issue of the ‘ability-disability’ dualism is considered critically. This is a powerful dualism and one that is possibly being blurred by the involvement of disabled people in flexible employment.

7.2 The context

The organisations reflect the diversity of opinions in the debate around disability and employment, including those who had a direct, and knowledgeable interest in disability and those with little knowledge, but still a significant role. On the whole the disability organisations had a greater knowledge of and interest in disability issues than the employment organisations, but there were interesting variations. For example, the trade union movement was informed and committed to radical disability politics.

This introduces the concept of *power* and how it operates through knowledge. In relation to Government policy-making, most significantly the Disability Discrimination Act, some of the business organisations had connections into, and influence over, crucial Government departments. So, although an organisation may have only a partial

knowledge of, and a limited commitment to, the issue of disability and employment, they may well still wield considerable influence over policy-making. And, further, they may influence the whole way that disability and employment, and disability itself, is thought about and acted upon.

Crucially, too, power is invested and held by individual people in organisations. It will become clear in the following analysis that individuals are crucial to the policy and position of the organisations (and the companies). And this was as, if not more, important in the 'lower levels' of the organisation. Power can be passed down to and interpreted by all levels of the organisation and this can make a real difference to policy-making and practice. It is through a combination of organisational policy-making and individual interpretation that organisations operate.

Although all the organisations were nationally-oriented, several had local networks of smaller organisations which, although part of the national framework, often acted independently. The two are closely linked. Policy-making is not just a national issue decided within the head offices in London, but is influenced - directly and indirectly - by the actions in local areas and the way these are passed back to London (or wherever the centre of the organisation is). The other important point is that it is at 'local levels' that policy-making is acted out. It is in the towns, cities and rural areas (Manchester in this research) that the latest initiative by one of the charities, or something more encompassing like the Disability Discrimination Act, affects people's lives and actually matters. What disability means, where the boundary is with ability, how the DDA is interpreted, how all those involved think and feel about ability-disability, all this is acted out in that one moment of negotiation. National policy-making is certainly important, but one must appreciate that it is a process that is *interpreted* by all of those involved.

Of course, the organisations interviewed do not act independently. All the organisations have developed together (some have been established for longer than others) and although there may only be weak official links between most of them, there are certainly unofficial connections. These relations can be positive and negative, for

instance in the latter case the mutual distrust between the RNIB and the BCODP³², based on different approaches to disability. There are many informal and official policy forums that the organisations develop policy and campaigns in.³³ These connections, although not inclusive and complete, as some organisations (e.g. Federation of Small Businesses) are not included in discussions, are crucial to the development of policy and the culture of understanding disability in the organisations involved. It is clear that these connections and discussions have intensified with the Disability Discrimination Act. There are several instances where the interests and functions of the organisations overlap and interact, with several strands emerging as the dominant 'weave' of the pattern (or network). Importantly, the 'weave' will be different in each local area as different stands combine to produce a certain pattern, and so a particular interpretation of the employment-disability debate.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), its predecessors, its development, its consultation, its passage through Parliament, its further consultation, its eventual enactment on 2nd December 1996 and the first Industrial Tribunals under its auspices, have formed a significant backdrop to the whole process of the research. The previous chapter talked about the importance of context in the research process. Although it is necessary in the process of analysis to abstract and talk about concepts and issues by themselves, one must always relocate the discussion in the situation within which it was occurring at the time of fieldwork. At the time of the interviews with the organisations the DDA was going through a process of formulating the Codes of Practice - the Act had been passed, but wasn't due to come into force for another 8 months and the details were being completed.³⁴ The Act was understandably in the forefront of all the interviewees'

³² RNIB is the Royal National Institute of the Blind; BCODP is the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People.

³³ For example 'Rights Now!' and the Workable workshops at IBM headquarters in London (plus many others); connections between the disability groups (the charities and the training/employment organisations), either through direct contacts, involvement in conferences (e.g. RADAR's conference at the London Hilton hotel on the DDA), or sponsorship (e.g. the Workable day conferences at IBM).

³⁴ E.g. 'should the definition of disability include mental illness?', and 'what should an employer do if a member of staff develops a visual impairment?'.

minds. There was a feeling of uncertainty about what it would eventually contain and this uncertainty was evident on both sides, with the employer organisations concerned that the Act would be both unclear and heavy handed and the disability organisations concerned that it would be unclear and would lack 'teeth'.

Another context was the protests by the disability movement, usually focused on the inadequacies of the DDA, particularly around transport. Such protests were fundamental in securing the DDA onto the statute book, whatever the Government's official line that they were only influenced by 'rational', business-like argument. The other context is a personal one. I learnt a great deal in the two months conducting this first round of interviews (as I did across the whole research), particularly about the way that organisations operate and the crucial part that individuals play in their operation. I also learnt that policy-making is not a fine art, but often a hit and miss affair, with the good ideas and intentions of those involved being reordered or even scrambled by the forces of reality or the divergent intentions of others.

The relationship between disability and employment is approached quite differently by the three 'groups' of organisations. Clearly, for the business organisations³⁵ disability is only one issue in their policy field and until recently not an issue at all for most (even the TUC). For them it is just one part of a broader 'equal opportunities' concern which tends to be the responsibility of one person or a small policy team (who may have limited knowledge of the issue). For the disability organisations³⁶, the situation is mirrored, in that their overall concern is disability, with employment just one issue. One issue that has brought these two groups of organisations together is the DDA, as it has required a focus on an issue that very directly links the interests of disability and employment, with the added impetus of possible legal consequences. So there had to be a coming together, however loosely, of minds on disability and employment. The third group of organisations aims to bridge the gap

³⁵ The employment organisations included: the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), the Institute of Directors (IoD), the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and the Training and Enterprise National Council (TEC).

³⁶ The disability organisations included: the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB), Scope, Mind, Mencap, British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP), and RADAR.

between disability and employment.³⁷ These organisations are perhaps becoming more important because of the issue just discussed, i.e. the charities and business organisations have a sectional interest in these issues, particularly in the context of the DDA. It could be argued that these organisations have the greatest expertise in the area of disability and employment, particularly the day-to-day concern of getting and keeping jobs, adapting jobs for people's needs and so on. This is where the 'nitty gritty' stuff happens, i.e. people applying for employment, gaining interviews (or not), being appointed, training and maintaining employment. While it is true that these organisations often miss the larger debates on disability and employment, having a largely practical approach, they are involved at the 'sharp end' and this is important.

How is the representation of disability and policy-making on disability and employment influenced by those who make it, i.e. is the person disabled or able-bodied? This is a vital question: the disability campaigning organisation interviewed (BCODP) stressed the importance of the distinction between 'organisations for' and 'organisations of' disabled people, claiming that an organisation where the power *did not* lie with disabled people, both as policy-makers and decision-makers, could not represent the interests of disabled people and would be likely to produce policy that further disadvantaged disabled people. This was summed up in a slightly different way by the representative of the RNIB,

"on the whole our side is run by people whose background is politics and philosophy, the other side is run by people who are themselves disabled" ... "What the real difference is, is that one group is motivated by anger and frustration, and for them the campaigning is as much about releasing that anger and frustration, I think, as about getting results".

The employment organisations regularly 'test the waters' by contacting members through newsletters and at meetings. The only time that there is a real surge of power from 'below' is when there is an issue that focuses the minds of members, such as the DDA or any change in Government policy. So, on the whole, power over policy-making is concentrated in the hands of a few people at the centre of the organisation.

³⁷ The 'facilitating' organisations included: Employers Forum on Disability (EFD), Outset and Workable.

7.3 Disability and employment

This section will address four questions: what do the organisations think is the central issue in the disability-employment debate? How do they *understand* and *represent* disability and employment? Is there an overall way of thinking within which disability and employment is understood? And can an embodied approach improve our understanding of this relationship?

7.3.1 *What is it really about?*

All of the organisations would agree that the central objective is giving disabled people greater opportunities in employment. There are, however, several sides to this seemingly simple and undoubtedly 'correct' statement, and the angle that an organisation has will determine its practical approach. Underlying all of this is an organisation's understanding of disability and employment and disability itself. There are three viewpoints here: 'business', 'practicalities' and 'rights'.

The 'business' viewpoint sees disability and employment as a matter for companies and the labour market, i.e. whether disabled people are employed or not, are given promotion or not, or lose their jobs or not, is nothing to do with who they are, but is wholly to do with the rationale of business (costs, skills, profits and so on). For the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), the situation is clear, the labour market is the centre of the debate,

"You've got disabled people competing with other people and at the moment there are lots of people who can do lots of things".

I am not saying that the FSB thinks that increased labour market 'efficiency' is the 'answer' to the 'problem' of disability and employment, rather that some organisations understand the labour market to be the main issue.

The second viewpoint can be entitled 'practicalities', that is, that the central matter of the disability and employment debate is how people get employment - the recruitment process; how they get *to* employment - transport; how they do the job - times worked and skills needed; and how they get support - money and advice. Thirdly, there is a 'rights' viewpoint. This interprets disability and employment as an issue of entitlement, not necessarily directly to employment, but more broadly to income, security and non-

discrimination. So, the focus for the debate, in this case, is not competing in the labour market for a job, but whether that job will be available to everyone or if there is some alternative form of income and security. To quote the BCODP,

“We want free and equal access to the workplace on a par with everybody else ... but if you want people to come off the unemployment register, or come out of the disability benefits system, you have to make work worthwhile, you have to make the nature of the job rewarding and you have to make the job pay more than you get for being at home”.

Of course, these three viewpoints on the disability-employment debate are not discrete. All of the organisations will have elements of all three viewpoints, but often with one more prominent than the others. For example, ‘Scope’ have both a ‘rights’ focus and a ‘practicality’ focus, but the latter is stronger and has more of a profile. ‘Outset’ also focus on ‘practicality’, but with a strong (but weaker, say, than the FSB) element of the ‘business’ focus. The TUC focuses on ‘rights’, with the ‘business’ angle present, but more obliquely than has so far been described.

It is important to mention that these three viewpoints in the debate, as well as overlapping, are criss-crossed by strong forces of power. Not all of the viewpoints have the same profile and weight in matters of debate and this does not remain fixed. The ‘business’ viewpoint has always (but perhaps particularly in the early and late 1980s) been the dominant focus, but in the mid-1980s and again in the mid-1990s, the ‘rights’ viewpoint has been the main focus of the debate (particularly over the DDA and its antecedents, the ‘business’ focus was to a large extent eclipsed by the ‘rights’ issue). The ‘practicality’ viewpoint has always been a focus, with great dominance in the years after 1945, until the late 1970s, but maybe a lower profile in the 1980s and 1990s as ‘business’ and ‘rights’ have stolen the limelight. Issues of ‘practicality’ continue to be discussed and are still important, but in ‘lower voices’. The ‘power’ is also with Government and business and although there have been times when ‘rights’ has been high on the agenda, these times have been short and in response to the processes and agenda of Government.

7.3.2 *Understanding and representing ‘disability and employment’*

These three viewpoints could be seen, as Michel Foucault would theorise, as three *discourses* of disability and employment, operating within, possibly, a single *discursive*

formation around the subject. This sub-section will draw on some of Foucault's work, particularly his text 'Power/knowledge' (1980), to explore the details of these discourses of disability and employment, how they are created and sustained and what implications they have (what *material* effects, as Foucault always stressed) for a person classified as disabled in employment.

First, however, it is important to open up the term 'understanding'. The recent so-called 'cultural turn' in the social sciences has seen an increased interest in language, representation and meaning. It is argued that language - words, phrases, but also images, music, objects and 'body language' - is much more than a neutral means of communication. Language does a lot more; it carries meaning, it 'represents' what we understand by a word. For example, the word 'ability': the seven letters have no meaning in themselves, i.e. they are simply shapes in a sequence, but they have a meaning to a user of the language (in this case English). 'Ability' means 'being able to do something'. However, and this is crucial to this debate about language, 'ability' can mean many things; i.e. it can be a skill, adaptability, power, or even the lack of disability. The meaning of the word 'ability' and of every object, event, and emotion, is dependent on its context - what we use things for, what we say about them (i.e. how we represent them), what we think and feel about them, how we value them and conceptualise them, gives them their meaning. So we can say that language is a 'system of representation' (Hall, 1997), a system of shared meanings and understandings of the things of life. Importantly, as the 'ability' example illustrates, this system of representation is not understood in the same way by everyone. So, although meanings are shared they are only partial and are always contested through the ongoing debate that sustains meaning (i.e. meaning isn't once and for all, it is continuously shaped and reshaped). These systems of representation, these groups of shared meanings, provide the framework for the way we understand and organise our lives; the meanings play a strong part in regulating social practices.

We can now think about how the organisations 'talk about' disability and employment in a different way. As the above discussion has argued, language is not innocent and this allows us to think about how and why meanings become associated

with certain actions, objects and events. There are several ways in which disability and employment are understood and represented by the organisations.

The first theme is 'work', i.e. what work means in relation to disabled people. The first understanding of disability and employment, as set out at the end of Chapter One, conceived work as a 'good' thing, something that everyone should do. There is a whole raft of literature on the importance of work in people's lives ranging from the financial to the psychological. Some of these arguments are put forward in the interviews, but with some interesting variations. Several of the charities state that employment is vital for disabled people: 'Scope' comments,

"The opportunity to gain employment is one of the most significant factors affecting the life of a disabled person. Employment opens up the prospect of financial independence and the possibility of a rewarding career".

The mental health charity 'Mind' supports this view,

"users and ex-users of mental health services ... should have the opportunity to develop personal and vocational skills, to earn and to participate fully in society".

And, more crucially, the charities are, in doing this, reflecting the opinions of, as they see it, most of their 'clients'; for example, Mencap,

"Having a job is still considered to be one of the most normal things you can do ... there's a growing demand from our client group for a job".

We can reflect on these statements about 'work' using the three viewpoints or discourses of disability and employment. 'Work' can be an issue of 'rights', the entitlement to a job, to something which is considered to be 'one of the most normal things you can do'. In this way work is a *leveller*, a way of achieving equality through the same activity and ultimately erasing the differences between what we understand as ability and disability. 'Work' can also be an issue of 'practicality' in that it is a way of earning income, of being financially and more generally independent. And on a personal level, work can be a practical necessity for people with particular impairments, for example with mental impairment. Mencap claims,

"The needs of people with a learning difficulty are identified as: having a regular job, earning the going rate for the work done and being accepted as a member of the workforce".

Mind states that to “participate fully in society” in this way is crucial to the mental well-being of their clients. Finally, the ‘business’ discourse is represented by the TEC National Council in its discussion about ‘diversity’,

“it’s the next stage on from equal opportunities ... you look at the needs of all the people in your organisation because you’ve got a diverse staff and you start from the individual”.

We can apply the three ‘discourses’ of disability and employment to the theme of work, within a wider framework of the meaning of ‘normality’. That is, ‘work’ is understood as a normal activity, an activity which is necessary to be involved in if one is to ‘participate fully in society’. While there is no doubt that a disabled person having the opportunity of employment is ‘a good thing’, it is important to realise that there are powerful forces of Government, organisations such as the ones quoted above, businesses and people themselves that make employment carry this strong meaning. BCODP challenges this dominant discourse,

“The illusion of work being wonderful, as central to our very experience, is to many people absolute rubbish ... It’s only when we don’t have work that we all want it, and we only want it because we don’t have enough to live on”.

But work as ‘a good thing’ remains the dominant discourse, and will certainly continue to be so. The first understanding of the disability-employment relation, as proposed in Chapter One, stresses that work is what everyone ‘should be’ involved in. The ‘business’ viewpoint raises another point: although employment can be seen as a ‘leveller’ (in the same way that sport is thought as a way of overcoming racial and ethnic divides) companies are actually making a point of mixture or ‘diversity’ in their workforce, by which they mean achieving a workforce that reflects both the demographic make-up of society and more immediately the character of their customer base.

A second theme is the ‘productivity’ of employees, or to put it another way, the measuring of a person’s addition to a company’s or organisation’s production process against some standard level (of productivity). ‘Scope’ talk about how the productivity of a disabled employee, “is measured in relation to the percentage of ability to do the job”, and how this is seen in relation to the standard, “employers won’t take people on because they can’t do the whole of the job”. ‘Scope’ continues,

“the job should be adjusted as much as possible, but there will come a point for some people where, because of their physical ability, they might be slower or might not be able to do some parts of it ... then there might be a need to top up”.

This last phrase refers to ‘Scope’s’ policy response to this understanding of disability and employment. The charity runs a ‘Supported Placement Scheme’ which involves ‘Scope’ finding a company placement for a disabled person, who is then assessed as to their productivity, or as the scheme puts it, the ‘percentage of the job you can do’; the company pays for that proportion, say 80 per cent, and ‘Scope’ ‘tops up’ the remainder. The hope, the charity says, is that “you will eventually build up to 100 per cent”, but notes that “most people don’t”. Another charity, the RNIB, agrees that disability and productivity are related, despite claims to the opposite (by, for example, the EFD and some companies),

“A lot of people want to believe that it isn’t an issue [but] you’ve just got to accept that you’re going to get reduced productivity”.

The alternative perspective comes from the TUC which claims there is little difference in productivity between disabled employees and able-bodied employees; it states,

“Most disabled people are able to do most jobs without any adaptations or special arrangements or whatever. Some disabled people need support in the adaptations to the work environment, [for example] special equipment”.

The Employers’ Forum on Disability have a similar viewpoint, stressing that productivity is not really an issue or, if it is, there is little difference between able-bodied and most disabled people. This opens up another large area, that of the distinctions between able-bodiedness and disability and the variability within the term ‘disability’. Such is the range of situations for disabled people and employment that one cannot generalise about the effect on productivity, but I would like to argue that there will be an effect on expected productivity if a person is significantly disabled and that even with adaptations to equipment and facilities, these effects will still matter. So, both ‘sides’ in the productivity debate are ‘right’, in the sense that they are talking about the same situation and are not trying to misrepresent it. The difference in interpretation, in meaning, is in the relationship between disabled people and employment and the relationship between ability and disability. The charities tend to adopt the framework of language and meaning of the ‘practicalities’ discourse, so are very aware of, and understand the situation

through, the everyday employment issues for people with impairments. The TUC and EFD, while not denying the situation for people in employment, understand the situation through the practices of the labour market, the 'business' discourse, i.e. employers see disabled employees in the same light as all others, as employees, so do not make any play of differential productivity.

The third theme is 'individuality'. The discussions with the organisations produced a sense that disabled employees were often understood and talked of as individuals. Chapter Three named 'individuality' as one of the key elements of the dominant discourse of disability as 'individual pathology'. Treating people as individuals is of course positive, every employee is obviously an individual and should be treated as such. This chapter is however not setting out to make judgements, rather its aim is to understand why disability has a certain meaning. One representative of a charity cited her own experience as a disabled person,

"Say I went for promotion and they knew that was going to cost another £2000, like any organisation they're trying to save money so it's got to be a factor".

The TEC National Council, from a rather different perspective, adds,

"[When recruiting] you're looking at what the person can do for you. That's the mental leap we're trying to get people who are recruiting to make, forget that that person's in a wheelchair or whatever. Look at your job and what you need for that job".

And the TUC, linking back to the debate on productivity,

"If you have an impairment that limits your productivity even in a non-discriminatory society you're going to find it very difficult to find work".

And the FSB, when talking about recruitment, states that,

"Everybody maybe can do the job, but you decide to give this person a chance. [But] the person's still got to be able to do the job ... Disabled people are saying that they don't want special treatment, what they want is 'I'm capable of doing this job, are you prepared to give it to me despite the fact that I've only got one leg'. If it says they are capable of doing the job, that's the same for everybody".

So, although it does nothing but good to treat people as individuals, it is also a very significant practice in terms of how disability-employment is understood. If this relationship is understood as some form of 'personal contract' between a disabled person and an employer, then employment is a personal not collective notion and a disabled person is separated, treated as a different employee (different every time, so not always a

matter of stereotypical discrimination). This brings us to a key issue of whether disability is a collective identity or an individual issue of impairment. The BCODP has a clear view that there is a collective group of disabled people who have shared needs and demands in the labour market. The TUC adds,

“[The issues for disabled people are different] in terms of specifics but not in terms of the principles”.

The second understanding set out at the end of Chapter One is in operation here, i.e. that disabled people are excluded from employment because of the inherently discriminatory structures and processes of capitalism. It is interesting to note the links between the themes of ‘productivity’ and ‘individuality’ - at first glance there appear to be contradictions in the statements of some of the organisations, for example, the EFD see disabled employees as the same as other employees in terms of productivity, but as different in terms of general employment practice (individuality). At second glance there are possible explanations: either all employees are understood as individuals, but disabled employees stand out because of possible support required, or organisations see companies as absorbing the differential needs of their disabled employees into the employment equation (including productivity).

A fourth theme is the changing employment situation in companies (and other organisations), what we shall call ‘restructuring’. Before we consider this, however, it will be useful to extend our discussion of language, meaning and representation. The reason for doing so at this point is that employment restructuring is a very important process and one in which companies have, in the present deregulated labour market, a great deal of power. We have already said that language and meanings regulate social conduct and practices in that they set rules and norms by which we understand and organise our lives. If we take these meanings in groupings, as related sets of statements and ideas, we have a ‘discourse’. Stuart Hall defines a ‘discourse’ in the following way: “a cluster of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (1997, p.6).

More broadly these discourses, or ‘discursive formations’, “define what is and what is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to, a particular

subject or site of social activity” (*ibid.*). Importantly, however, even though there is a particular ‘mind set’ present in a discursive formation, this fundamental understanding can have many different forms, which can encompass different, even contradictory viewpoints; it is the basic assumptions that link across these viewpoints that maintain it as a discursive formation. And what is particularly relevant here, in relation to our discussion of power, is that discursive practices are not merely descriptions of what happens, but are actually ‘constitutive’, i.e. they have the power to create social practices through the meaning of language (and how this is acted out - which is determined by the meaning). Foucault, in ‘Power/knowledge’ (1980), stressed that power was his focus, that the concept of ‘language’ gave a rather polite idea of what meaning was about - he preferred the analogy of war and battle, a continual fight over meaning. Foucault talked about discourse rather than language and, as we have already noted, in doing so he bridged the gap between what we say and what we do, by arguing that what we say *is* what we do.

Hall argues that Foucault made two distinct contributions: firstly, he questioned the idea of ‘truth’ arguing that through the application of discourses through power, knowledge *could make itself true*. For Foucault, the issue of crime illustrated this: what is the knowledge and understanding of crime in a particular period has a strong influence on how we regulate, control and punish criminals. This discursive formation creates, in Foucault’s words, a ‘regime of truth’, i.e. a particular event or opinion is said to be true and then acted upon as such and as a result becomes true. The research referred to this issue in Chapter Four, in an attempt to ‘make the connection’ between social construction and concrete effects; the concept developed was termed ‘materialisation’, very close to what Foucault argues above. The second contribution he made was on power. Foucault challenged the idea that power operates in one direction, that is from top to bottom, rather he saw it as circulating, and “deployed and exercised through a net-like organisation” (1980, p.98), in which we are all somehow involved. He also saw power as not simply negative or repressive, but also as positive or productive, “it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but ... it traverses and produces things ... It needs to be thought of as a productive network which runs through the whole social body” (1980, p.119).

Returning to our discussion of the fourth theme - 'restructuring' - it could be argued that, drawing on the last part of the above argument, companies are not the holders of power in the discourse (words and deeds) of disability and employment. The 'net' of power certainly does not run out of employers in a strong unchallenged flow. There are many other holders and exercisers of power in this debate, involved in the 'battle' over the meaning and understanding of disability. There is a 'translation' of meaning, not a pure 'transmission'. However, employers do have enormous practical power in restructuring their workforces and the discussion will now look at how their meanings become actions, or rather how the other organisations in the 'net' understand their influence and meaning.

'Scope' states that, "every corporation is cutting back and reorganising", and the implication of this is that,

"in the job market they can pick and choose because there is an excess of labour, and so it's going to be more and more difficult for disabled people to get jobs, because they won't be given a chance because there's always going to be someone else with more experience".

This statement interprets employers as understanding disabled employees as different workers, extra workers, those who are not recruited when a company is under pressure. The 'Scope' representative thinks that the other side of this is that some employers will make the point of keeping some disabled employees,

"I think the big [employers] will keep it going [i.e. employ disabled people while they shed thousands of jobs] because they are concerned about their public image".

So, the discourse of disability and employment here is that disabled employees have a dual nature of being readily disposed of when restructuring occurs, yet at the same time are 'protected' from the process. The understanding or 'knowledge' of disabled people as a necessary but difficult and inflexible part of the workforce becomes real, or a 'regime of truth', when the power of the employers is put into practice. So, if 'Scope's' analysis is right (and, of course, there are other views), the 'knowledge' of the companies around disability, whether this knowledge is the 'truth' or not, will become the real, everyday experience for disabled people in employment through company employment practices. The TUC sees the situation with employers as one of 'a new labour settlement',

“we certainly don’t see the new labour market settlement as being either the voluntary approach or the statutory approach ... where agreements with employers are not possible we are also looking for statutory agreements”.

The FSB sees the restructuring situation in the following way,

“You’ve got disabled people competing with other people, and at the moment there are lots of people who can do lots of things. And you get to the point when you say ‘who’s going to be the most effective and easiest to accommodate in the firm?’”.

Does this confirm that it is indeed the large companies alone who are taking on board the dual nature of disability in relation to ‘restructuring’? The representative of ‘Scope’ sums up the situation and the power of the discourse in this simple phrase, “it’s attitudes backed up with resources”. This is saying very clearly that the situation is different for larger companies with more resources, but that the decisions of company managers is crucial, the exercising of their power in employing staff, in operating their understandings of disability and employment. It matters how an organisation is structured, where the policy is made, what the network is and how it is then combined with these organisations which are imbued with power; that is, the power to constitute through discourse, the meanings and realities of disability and employment.

The fifth theme is ‘support’, and refers to the debate in Chapter One on ‘supported’ and ‘open’ employment. There is a dualistic notion of employment in the disability arena between ‘open’, i.e. jobs in the ‘normal’ labour market, and ‘supported’ employment, i.e. jobs in the ‘protected’ labour market. There is a long-standing debate over the rights and wrongs of these two types of employment for disabled people, a debate in which the organisations are involved. Scope, who operate, as we have noted, a ‘supported placements scheme’, question the concept and practice of supported employment (‘Scope’ would call this ‘sheltered employment’), “I don’t think it’s a good thing ... it’s just awful, it’s marginalising, not a real job”. They see, instead, ‘open’ employment as the right approach, “you actually need to be out there in the mainstream”, and their scheme supports people in ‘open’ employment, “that’s where supported placement is much better because it’s in the mainstream”. The TEC National Council supports this line, saying,

“[Supported placements] are vital ... it’s getting people through the door that is the most important thing that agencies can do”.

There is a consensus amongst most charities that sheltered or supported employment is not the 'right' way to create employment opportunities for disabled people, but there is an acceptance that there is a demand for that kind of opportunity from many disabled people, neatly summed up by the Mencap representative,

"personally I would like to see the majority of them closed down because I don't believe people are getting a good deal, but they will continue".

The TUC accepts that supported employment is a controversial area but still defends its existence on the grounds that there is demand and a need,

"There are 20,000 people in supported employment and they are real jobs ... For some disabled people (for whom the range of jobs they can do is limited), who face a significant labour market disadvantage because of their impairment, supported employment is a good thing".

A few charities who run sheltered employment centres, such as 'Action for Blind People', would support this, arguing that they employ many people who would not get work in the open labour market. There are several points which come out of this: firstly, there is a notion of a 'real' labour market, which is somehow free and equal and involvement in this labour market, whether one is successful or not, is crucial. If one is outside this labour market in supported employment, then this is not a 'real' employment experience and, so referring back to the first theme of 'work', the 'blurring of the boundary' between disability and ability does not happen. The TUC representative preferred to call supported employment by its original title of 'sheltered' employment, because "the name sheltered makes sense ... it's a sheltered area of the labour force". This links to the second point: it is in these areas of employment where it is 'easier' to be disabled, i.e. the premise of supported employment is that 'levelling' is not possible for everyone and so a stronger sense of what 'disability' might be develops. Thirdly, and from the 'practicality' viewpoint, supported employment delivers employment to many people. The 'rights' angle would see it as avoiding the real issue of discrimination, indeed supporting discrimination. To complete the trio, the 'business' discourse would understand supported employment as a 'special' type of work which very definitely operates outside 'normal' employment practices.

7.3.3 *Interconnections, discursive formations and the body*

The previous section identified five themes which run through the debate around disability and employment. There are clearly many overlaps and interconnections between these five themes, and this sub-section will consider some of these, as well as thinking about whether there is an overall discursive formation around 'disability and employment'.

There are clear connections between the concepts of 'work', 'productivity' and 'individuality'. If a person is understood to have a personal contract with their work, then in return for the financial reward and social advantage they are expected to produce a certain 'normal' level of output. The 'levelling' of work that was spoken of operates both ways: increasingly, disabled people - indeed all workers - are being expected to perform at the same (indeed ever higher) level. The act of work becomes an individual, personal performance where certain standards are expected, the 'reward' being some sense of 'normality'. Supported employment on the other hand operates very much on the 'group' principle, i.e. disabled people as a collective group making a joint contract with a company for employment and in doing so having a different notion of normality and ability/disability. The 'restructuring' theme brought in the element of power and perhaps disrupts the 'good' notion of individuality and personal contracts with employment. It can be argued that some companies in their restructuring plans understand and construct disabled employees as, at the same time, an individual *and* as part of a group, i.e. as 'just another employee' *and* 'an important part of a diverse workforce'. The result is that there is confusion amongst employers and disabled employees about their 'deal' in employment - are they in 'normal' open employment, employed as individuals, being productive for the returns that work brings, *or* are they part of a group that is treated as such by employers, is less productive and can never benefit fully from employment, except in supported employment where disabled people are understood as a group?

But what of a discursive formation? Is there a systematic understanding of disability and employment? We have seen that there is a series of interconnections between the five themes that emerge from the interviews with organisations and the three discourses (rights, business and practicality). Referring to the earlier discussion, we can

note that Foucault conceived such discourses as operating in a 'net-like organisation' of power relations. More importantly, the three discourses are part of, following Foucault's argument, a broader discursive formation, i.e. "Whenever these discursive events refer to the same object, share the same style and support a strategy, a common institutional, administrative or political drift and pattern" (Cousins and Hussain, 1984, p.84-85). Importantly too, we can see that the first two understandings of disability and employment, as set out in Chapter One, are both within the same discursive formation. It is important to note, firstly, these discourses include everything, i.e. not just what is consciously said, but also images, ideas, conduct, bodily actions, in all settings. Secondly, the crucial argument is that these discourses are not simply representations which can change with, say, a publicity campaign, but are deeply embedded, self-reinforcing understandings of a situation, of a set of relations. They are held in place, in a 'net-like organisation', by flows of power. The end result is that it is very difficult, indeed often impossible, to understand and talk about an issue in a different way. When the meanings of words (where this section began) are so deeply engrained then the language cannot cope with alternative understandings.

One possible way of approaching the discursive formation of disability and employment is to consider the issue of the 'body'. Chapter Four argued that the 'body' was a useful way of approaching the concept of disability, in that it allowed a discussion of the material and social elements of disability and enabled the ability/disability dualism to be challenged. The 'body' theory has another use too, as it encourages one to think about the disability and employment relationship and the discursive formation around disability and employment. The best starting point is to make the connection between discursive theory and the body. Foucault's texts, in particular 'Discipline and Punish' (1977), placed the 'body' at the centre of the operation of discourse, at the centre of the struggles over the different systems of knowledge and power. The thesis of 'Discipline and Punish' was that criminals were punished in various disciplinary regimes, with different types or 'technologies' (as Foucault would put it) of punishment applied to the body. Different bodies were 'produced' through these different discourses of punishment. So, the body is far more than the physical entity that we all possess. The body becomes

inscribed, imbued, engrained with different discourses of, in this case, techniques of punishment. As Foucault put it, “the body is totally imprinted by history” (1977, p.63) and a possible approach to the study of discursive formations is a deconstruction of the ‘marked’ body. As Foucault puts it,

“Try to study the metamorphosis of punitive methods on the basis of a political technology of the body, in which might be read a common history of power relations and object relations. Thus, by an analysis of penal leniency as a technique of power, one might understand both how man, the soul, the normal and abnormal individual have come to duplicate crime as objects of penal intervention; and in that way a specific mode of subjection was able to give birth to man as an object of knowledge for a discourse with a ‘scientific’ status” (1977, quoted in Rabinow, 1984, p.171).

What Foucault is saying is that the body holds within it many processes, social relations and power relations and it is a reading of this body that can reveal these processes of power and the deeper understandings on which they are based.

To make the connection back to disability and employment, we need firstly to consider what approach to take, i.e. is this the ‘body’ as in a method of analysis or the ‘body’ as a possible discursive formation? In fact, it is both. Foucault’s concept of the body lying at the centre of the struggles over different formations of power and the object of the inscription of power, can be used to look at disability and employment. I argue that by looking at the ‘body’ as the focus of the three discourses of disability and employment, we discover that it is the body and the way it is used in employment that is the basis of the discursive formation of disability and employment.

‘Business’ is the discourse that sees disability and employment as a matter of business and the labour market - as (to summarise the five themes) individuals, who make a choice to work to secure its benefits, in open employment, competing against others in a competitive labour market and in doing so have to prove that they are a productive employee. Secondly, the discourse of ‘practicalities’, disability and employment as a matter of getting disabled people into jobs - as a group of people who need support to get and keep employment, seen as a benefit to them, the support possibly being sheltered employment and an acceptance of lower productivity. And thirdly, the ‘rights’ discourse, disability and employment as a matter of ‘rights’ to work and non-discrimination - as a

group of people who should be treated as individuals, who should have work if they want it and if they are unable to reach certain levels of productivity, should have the support to make this possible.

The three discourses are, of course, different takes on the issue of disability and employment, but they also share a common understanding or 'mind-set' of what 'disability and employment' *is*, i.e. the possible discursive formation. This common understanding can, as the above discussion argued, be centred on the body. The 'body', as Chapter Four discussed, can be thought of in a number of ways in relation to employment: (again the five themes are useful) work as being good for the body ('work'), the body as a productive object ('productivity'), the body as an object of ownership and as important in individual identity ('individuality'), the body as an object that organisations have power over ('restructuring') and the body as needing, or not, support for employment ('support'). The body in all of these ways is deeply involved in the process of employment and the debate is made more complex by the fact that these are 'non-perfect' or 'damaged' bodies. This is interesting in a number of ways: firstly, it makes one consider the whole nature of work, i.e. work is not a simple notion of people and capital in contract, rather people's bodies are involved and any notion of 'perfect' productivity or efficiency is questioned. Secondly, the bodily (mind and body) actions involved in work are seen as important, i.e. a person doesn't just do a job, they are deeply involved in its process. And, thirdly, work is organised in various ways, it is not an equal, individually-based process, so people's bodies are 'branded' with meaning and a group identity (whether work related or not). The body is at the centre of the work process, and at the same time focusing on it can help us to understand the complexities of the work process. The ability/disability of bodies is central to the argument too. The five themes of the discussion show that the body, and its identity as 'able' or 'disabled', has a huge effect on how it is understood in so far as all five are seen as markers or boundaries of ability and disability (able and disabled bodies): 'work' - something that able-bodied 'normal' people do, 'productivity' - you or you are not, 'individuality' - a marker of able-bodiedness (or approximate to), 'restructuring' - how you are affected will depend on your ability 'status', and 'support' - only those who are disabled require support.

What then can we say about a discursive formation around disability and employment? The two concepts are, in their 'true' forms, an 'impossibility', i.e. disability necessarily means that employment is not possible and ability means that employment is possible. The themes and the three discourses discussed shared this common understanding, that is, 'disability' is something that has to be adapted to, covered up, or 'cured' for a person to be employed and, vice-versa, employment has to be adapted or 'supported' for a disabled person to work. Now, just to re-emphasise the point: I am not saying that this is right, or that this is always the case - it is widely known that many disabled people work without any adaptation being made to the workplace - but it is the understanding that underlies the discussions with the organisations. There is a clear distinction made between ability and disability and between employment and non-employment. The very word 'disability', if we apply a discursive analysis to this, implies a lack of ability, or an inability, and 'employment' means the use of something to do something. One doesn't 'employ' a body that 'lacks ability'.

This is clearly an extreme position, and one that I do not subscribe to, but it makes an important point, i.e. that there is a deeply-embedded understanding that disabled people (and there is a strong definition here too) can only be in employment if measures to change the employment or disability situation are taken. The importance also of a discursive formation is what it *does not* consider to be important. In this case, it assumes the binary of ability and disability, and employment and non-employment, ignoring the diversity within the categories and the ongoing shifting of the boundary between them. It also ignores the complexity and lack of 'purity' of these concepts and the forces of power relations that generate them. The body again has a dual role, i.e. it is the processes of the discursive formation just described, operating through social and institutional practices, that inscribe the body with a meaning of ability and disability, employment and non-employment and the body at the same time is the way that we can begin to deconstruct this formation.

The central criticism that can be made of the notion of the discursive formation around disability and employment is that it is a disembodied conceptualisation. Although it has been argued above that the 'body' lies at the centre of the discursive formation of

disability and employment, this is really the body as a representational concept. I would like to extend the debate into the concept of 'embodiment'. The crucial difference is that embodiment is concerned with the way that the body (mind and body) is used, changed by this use and in turn changes the way that it is used. Chapter Four developed a theory of disability as an embodied process, i.e. a way of thinking about disability that attempts to bring together the individual and social understandings of disability, by using the concept of 'materialisation' or the 'coming into being' of constructions through repetition and reproduction (Butler, 1993). Coming out of this is a sense of the body and, following that, disability as a 'process', i.e. a continual negotiation and renegotiation of what disability is, but crucially these 'meanings' are material in their construction. So, disability is, I argue, a social construction that varies over time and space, but it is a very real, experienced social construction, because social processes are embedded or *embodied* within the person's body.

We can now rethink the discursive formation of disability and employment. Although I consider that the evidence from the interviews clearly supports the existence of a powerful discursive formation around disability and employment, using an embodied approach can possibly allow us to push the formation a little further. What an embodied approach to disability does, as argued above, is introduce the notion of *process* into the discussion. This forces one to think in terms of constant change, or more precisely in terms of moments of 'impermanent fixity', i.e. the continual reproduction of disability, but with periods of stability and fixity. It is the concept of process that is an important challenge to the notion of a discursive formation around disability and employment. A 'formation' implies a certain level of fixity with agreed and deeply-seated assumptions and understandings of both 'disability' and 'employment'. We know from the empirical evidence that there is a continual rethinking of the meanings of disability and employment and the understanding of the relationship between the two. The organisation of employment is undergoing significant changes (see following section) and, at the same time, there is an increasing debate around the definition and extent of disability. If we combine this with our notion of process, then we can see that it is important to rethink the fixed assumptions of the discursive formation around disability and employment.

However, there is no doubt that a discursive formation is in place and that it is powerful. How can we 'square the circle' of these apparently disparate understandings? The possible approach I suggest is focused around *power*. While there are complex forces in process around employment and disability, it is not a straightforward challenge to the formation. The reason is the body, or rather the embodiedness of both employment and disability. The processes of employment and embodiedness that produce the materiality of the employment situation of disabled people are not unlimited and immediately changeable. What I mean by that, using Foucault's concept of 'imprinting on the body', is that social and physical processes have a lasting impact on the body and, as it is the body that carries meaning, so this meaning has a lasting existence that takes a period to change. Hence the concept of 'impermanent fixity'. The practices that provide the 'frame' within which these processes and fixities happen are practices of power, i.e. decisions, actions and connections that make things happen and maintain understandings and structures. Of course, with power there is significant unevenness, so certain understandings of disability and employment and the relation between the two, become powerful, privileged and reproduced. In the case of this present discussion, it is the discursive formation's underlying assumption about the impossibility of employment and disability that is reproduced and embedded by the powerful forces - attitudes and actions - of business, Government and disability groups. While there is a growing theoretical challenge to this formation, it at present lacks significance and power.

The concepts of embodiment, materialisation and process, explored in Chapter Four, can be applied to our understanding of disability and employment by forcing a rethink of the discursive formation around disability and employment. A rejection of the formation, however, is not an option because of its significance and continuing power. What we can argue, instead, is that 'unravelling' the formation using an embodied approach reveals the lines and structures of power that keep the formation 'in place' and also reveals the important (but not as yet significant) challenges to the formation.

7.4 Flexibility in employment

This section will take the discursive formation - the 'impossibility' of the concepts 'disability' and 'employment' - and use it to consider the issue of *flexible* employment and disability. What difference does this latest reworking of employment make to the discursive formation? Does it operate within the same 'mind-set'? Are the changes reinforcing the understanding of disability and employment or challenging it?

In Chapter Five I argued that flexible employment needs to be reconsidered using an embodied approach. This will allow a rethinking of flexibility that moves away from a focus on 'outcome' in employment to a focus on 'process' and 'materialisation' in employment.

7.4.1 Flexibility and disability

'Flexibility' has a double level of meaning, i.e. it is understood, *firstly*, as an overarching concept that means different things to different people, but is generally seen as either 'good' or 'bad' and, *secondly*, as the specifics of part-time, flexitime and so on. Many of the disability organisations are concerned about flexibility at the first level of meaning. For example, the RNIB understands it as follows,

"The flexible workforce means that there is even more pressure on anybody whose disability means a significant loss of productivity",

and they see the shift to flexibility by companies (and other organisations) "treated as though it was ordained by nature". 'Mind', the mental health charity, is an exception as it, "approaches the concept of [flexibility] from a positive point of view, but we are aware of the negative side to it".

'Mind' makes an important distinction about flexibility, that is, 'flexibility for who?' and comments,

"The other side of flexibility is that the cost is carried by the employee and it depends on who is expected to be flexible and where the insecurity lies".

The other point they raise is around 'security'. Employment security, or rather insecurity, is the current focus of the labour market debate. For disabled people this is important: it is not simply employment that is the issue, but what sort of employment and how long that employment will last. The employment organisations have a mixed response to flexible working, with the TUC seeing the pros and cons as follows,

“There are advantages for employees in flexible working but there are major problems as well ... We’re very keen on enabling people to do the amount of work they want and having equal rights, turning flexibility into a two-way street”,

and they sum this up as “we emphasise the business case for positive flexibility”. The TEC National Council accepts that,

“It’s definitely happening. The idea of your workforce, your knowledge workers if you like, your technical specialists, and then your contracted workforce, has taken hold quite seriously, particularly in larger companies”.

This last point is picked up by the FSB, who state that while “The small firm sector has been the sector where there has been job growth”, flexibility hasn’t been so evident, “Our evidence is that this is not something that small firms are good at”. To summarise, at the first ‘level’ of meaning, ‘flexibility’ is a concept which all the organisations have a clear impression of and view on. It is a concept that they see as one of uncertainty, while noting its potential advantages. But the stress is on flexibility for who, employer or employee? This is a clear instance of a debate over *power in employment* and also on the size of firm; it is the larger firms, the firms which are more generally restructuring and shedding employees that are involved in flexible working practices, while small firms are where the job growth is, but are not great users of flexible practices.

The second level of meaning of ‘flexibility’ is in the actual practices themselves. The organisations all talk quite narrowly about flexible working, with part-time working, flexitime, temporary employment and associated short-term contracts being the practices included. The TEC National Council comments on short-term contracts,

“It’s difficult to say but there must be a conflict with people on short-term contracts and always looking for work”,

and goes on to consider the effect on the employment relation, “There’s a psychological element there in terms of loyalty to the company”. What this is saying is that the relationship between employer and employee becomes difficult if a person feels insecure in their work. The TUC also focuses on this issue of (in)security,

“The issue we’ve been pushing is job insecurity ... our concern with flexible employment is that it is very much a matter of labour market strength ... if you’ve got 3 or 4 jobs then you’re quite secure as if one job goes you’ve got the others. But if you’re in a weak position ...”.

So, flexible working practices have been extended to cover insecurity by several of the organisations. This is interesting because in the flexibility literature this is not dealt with

(apart from Allen and Henry, 1997). The level of (in)security is measured against the employee's 'labour market strength'. The implication is that if someone has low labour market strength then they will be vulnerable to the practices of flexibility. The TUC take up the theme of 'strength' when talking about part-time work, emphasising that it supports a person's choice,

"What we want is a genuine choice that where people would prefer to work part-time we will support them to do so. But on the other hand there are significant numbers of part-timers who would like to work more hours ... we're very keen on enabling people to do the amount of work they want".

The TUC clearly wants to help employees achieve labour market strength where they might not have it naturally, by campaigning on individuals' behalf and generally.

How do the organisations think these changes affect disabled people in the labour market? Some of the organisations agree, from different sides of the debate, that the effect on disabled people will be the same as for all employees. The Institute of Directors cannot see why disabled people should have a different experience from able-bodied people in flexible employment practices, claiming that employers will consider each person on the basis of their skills and ability to do the job; whether the job is full-time, part-time or a short-term contract will make no difference to this 'clear' employment decision. Another employment organisation, the TEC National Council, supports this view,

"I can't see that there is a connection [between part-time jobs and disabled people] because disability is so broad [a category]".

The TUC's recognition of the problems of flexible working and the campaign to strengthen labour market power to, as they put it, "turn flexibility into a two-way street ... will also apply to disabled people". So here disabled employees are understood, as section 7.3 observed, as *individuals* in the labour market, *all* needing protection.

On the other hand, many of the organisations insist that disabled people will be particularly affected by the changes in employment practice. Mencap, the mental disability charity, is concerned about the amount of time in the job. Its overall concern is 'regular work' for its clients and it comments,

"The main difference between employing someone with a learning difficulty and any other individual, is that the former may sometimes need a longer period of time to learn the job".

It interprets the changes in employment practice as making this requirement difficult, “There are far more part-time temporary jobs and the kind of people we work with, even the more able, need a fairly long lead in, a period of time to learn the job, and because of the way jobs are structured now - short-term, part-time - by the time they’ve learnt the job it’s changed or the job’s gone. They’re not equipped to do that, they can’t manage that”.

Mencap’s response for its clients is, “we have to look at those jobs which last for a reasonable length of time”. This is clearly an attempt to take many disabled people outside the flexible labour market, a labour market that Mencap describes as,

“cut-throat ... it’s more difficult to keep people in jobs due to the short-term pressures and the short-term nature of some contracts”.

‘Scope’ also interprets flexible practices as damaging to disabled people’s chances of employment,

“If someone’s offering a six months contract and they’ve got an extra cost to cover, it’s got to [make it difficult], why pay more if you can get someone else doing the same job?”.

This raises the issue of disabled people possibly costing more to employ and that such extra costs are ‘outside’ the operations of the labour market. This implies that employing a disabled person is an employment decision of goodwill, not an economic decision. Mind comments that this extra cost or extra effort will only happen,

“If it is someone they [a company] want to keep they will go to more trouble to make it work”.

This introduces the concept of a hierarchy of jobs and of employees, which will inevitably be connected to the type of job and contract a person is on. So, for instance an employee is more likely to be valued and held onto if they are in a long-term contract and possibly full-time job. Atkinson’s theory of core and periphery employees (1984) can be applied to a certain extent here, with the addition of a dynamic, i.e. the core (full-time, secure part-time) employees are the ones that companies protect in periods of employment change and the peripheral ones (short-term contracts) are not so protected.

To summarise the above discussion: firstly, there is a clear feeling that flexibility involves real employment practices and has real effects. Secondly, there is a debate about whether these real effects are different for disabled people and able-bodied people, with some claiming that all employees are affected, to a lesser or greater degree, by the changes and others claiming that disabled people, because of their weak labour market position, are more vulnerable to changes. Thirdly, and most crucially in my view, the issue that seemed to run right through all of the debate was *insecurity* and labour market

position. So, flexibility is less to do with the 'time-edit' of the job, i.e. whether it is part-time, flexitime and the contract nature of the job, and much more to do with the level of security that employees feel that they have.

So, is there a different experience for disabled employees in the flexible labour market? As Mencap commented, many disabled people do need a more stable working environment and 'Scope' added that some disabled people can cost more to employ and the experience can all depend on where a person is in the company - the type of job and place in the hierarchy. There is an important point, (noted above) made by the TEC National Council, that necessarily complicates the discussion,

"I can't see that there is a connection [between part-time jobs and disability] because '*disability*' is *so broad*" (emphasis added).

This research as a whole holds the position that the dualism between ability and disability is a constructed one and there is both a huge variation within the binary positions and a huge amount of blurring of the boundary between them. The research adopts an embodied approach to find a new way of talking about ability and disability. So, in the present discussion while it is necessary to use the terms 'ability' and 'disability' to talk about the subject of flexible working, it is also necessary to emphasise that these terms are complex social constructions. The present debate in fact plays a part in these constructions of disability: it both blurs and hardens the difference between disabled and able-bodied employees - blurs because *all* employees experience the problems and insecurities (and benefits) of flexible employment (e.g. 'Mind' comments that, "Temporary work can make for anxiety and insecurity") and hardens because some disabled people need a stable employment environment and a longer period in a job. Moreover, they potentially cost more to employ (or rather, this is the common belief) and can't so easily take advantage of many of the jobs on offer.

A flexible working environment has two levels of meaning, on the first level there is debate about whether disabled people are affected by it, with the general feeling, as in the previous chapter, that the two terms are an 'impossibility', in this case 'flexibility' and 'disability'. At the second level of meaning, there is again a debate over the affect on disabled people, which concludes that it is the security of work that is the crucial thing. In theory, flexibility in terms of part-time employment can only be to the advantage of all

employees, including disabled people, as it allows people to organise their lives, to 'time-edit' their jobs, family lives, care needs and so on. But, as the BCODP puts it,

"From a disabled person's point of view I think theoretically it has many advantages ... If you accept that disability is about society's failure to address the needs of people with impairments, then by definition you have to accept the fact that not everybody can work 40 hours a week, between 9 and 5, so you have to devise a system that accommodates people's needs. And flexible working is theoretically a step forward. The problem is that generally you've got a problem with benefits. Flexible working usually means part-time working, and once you get into that you've got part-time wages, and once you get part-time wages, you lose out on benefits".

So, if the system of benefits was more flexible, to respond to the flexibility of employment (a proposal of the Social Justice Commission, published as McLaughlin, 1994), then flexible working, in some senses, would be a clear benefit to all employees, but to disabled people in particular (as people classified as disabled receive a higher level of benefits, much of which is put in jeopardy by working).

This sub-section, using the evidence from the interviews with organisations, has concluded that *insecurity* in employment was the main experience and that the time factor and skill factor although important were overshadowed by this. However, it is still useful to think about skill and time-space. Firstly, skill can be seen more broadly as the ability to change, to be multi-skilled. It was argued earlier that the 'multi-skilling' ideal of the flexible employee is usually translated as 'multi-tasking', i.e. a demand to do more jobs than before, not necessarily requiring any extra skills. So, for disabled people, the prospect of different skills being in demand in the 'new era' of flexible employment is rather a false one. It is in most cases the opposite - rather than multi-skills being demanded, it is the 'flexibility' to take on more work, to multi-task, that is the issue. For many disabled people this simply exacerbates their present labour market position. Secondly, on the issue of time-space, it is more the certainty or *security* of that time-space of employment which is crucial thing. If the 'time-edit' is the same every week and the employment space is predictable then flexible working can advantage disabled people. But if there is constant change to the work time-space and this is inconstant over a period then, for all its supposed benefits, flexible working will not be an option for many disabled people.

7.4.2 *Discursive formation of disability and employment and the body*

The previous section proposed that there is a discursive formation around disability and employment. This formation, it was argued, is that 'disability' and 'employment', as they are understood and represented, are an 'impossibility'. One of the central aims of this research is to understand the impact of flexible working practices on disabled people in employment, so it is important to think about how the above discussion of flexible employment supports or challenges the discursive formation around disability and employment. It was also suggested in the previous section that an embodied approach to disability and employment allowed the discursive formation to be both respected as still powerful, and critiqued as mis-representing the complexity of the employment position of disabled people.

There are two sides to this argument: on the one hand, flexible working arrangements, from part-time working to short-term contracts, affect most parts of the UK economy, but in particular large service sector companies and all employees are involved to an extent. So, such arrangements are likely to affect both able-bodied and disabled employees, if not in the same way, then in similar processes. On the other hand, disabled people, because of their different needs and different levels of productivity, will be affected in different ways (positively and negatively).

So, rather than simply strengthening or weakening the overall discursive formation, the expansion of flexible working practices has made the picture more complex. By cutting across the employment 'standard' in terms of skill and time-space, practices such as part-time working and short-term contracts, have created a whole new way of understanding what work is. In particular, in terms of time-space, many jobs are now insecure (or perceived to be so) or are highly demanding in terms of hours and many more jobs now require a greater range of skills and technical/people capabilities. At the same time the notion of what disability 'is' is being challenged in some quarters by these changes in work (and in society more generally).

So, the discursive formation of the 'impossibility' of employment and disability is complicated as both concepts are disrupted and changed in meaning. The picture is now more complex and is different in different circumstances. So, in any particular

employment situation, with its own combination of skill and time-space, the formation works differently. What impact flexible working arrangements will have depends on what type of practices, in what type of company, what disability is involved, indeed all parts of the equation. To conclude, the formation is still in place in the arena of flexibility, but the altered understanding of what employment and disability 'are' is complicating matters.

7.5 The Disability Discrimination Act and Government policy

The labour market, even with recent deregulation, operates within a framework of legislation and Government policy. Chapter Six emphasised the importance of the framework or context of both the research subject and the research process. This section will consider the two major contextual features of labour market regulation: the recent Disability Discrimination Act and the benefits system as it relates to disabled people and employment.

7.5.1 The Disability Discrimination Act

The enactment of a significant piece of employment and anti-discrimination legislation is a major event, particularly when it is done by a Conservative Government committed to a deregulated labour market. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has already had a significant impact on the issue of disability and employment, if only so far in terms of debate rather than action (the latter will have to wait until the Act has been in place for several years).³⁸ It has, because of the legal consequences, forced organisations and companies to think more clearly about disability and employment, to consider such significant issues as, 'who is disabled?' and 'why are so few disabled people in work?'. The other effect it has had is to make disabled people more visible in employment. Employers and organisations are now highly sensitive to their disabled employees and to the issues of disability in employment. Whether this sensitivity is more to do with fear of prosecution and public image and less to do with equality for disabled people in employment, has yet to be determined.

³⁸ The details of the DDA are in Chapter One.

A whole range of issues emerged in the interviews with organisations. An Act of Parliament, because of its legal consequences and (usually unspoken) perception that it will change the way that its subject is understood by society, means that debate around it is often strongly worded and polarised. The TUC sees the enactment of the DDA as an historic moment,

“The DDA is the only major piece of employment regulation this Government has introduced. That’s a major achievement for the disability movement ... we have a new social movement emerging and even this Government is unable to withstand the pressure. In 1990 the Government refused to accept that discrimination on grounds of disability existed, in 1993 they said discrimination existed but that legislation wasn’t the best way to deal with it, in 1995 they introduced their own Act. It’s a remarkable story”.

‘Scope’ too is on the whole positive about the new legislation, “The employment side is probably the strongest part of the Act ... The legislation is a step forward”. The disability organisations and the TUC (from the employment organisations) accept that the DDA is ‘progress’, but are disappointed with the detail. In a policy statement the TUC is,

“very critical of the DDA, but unions will wish to use it wherever possible to win advantages for disabled members”.

The RNIB sums up the general position nicely,

“The Act itself is very weak, but it creates a context for encouraging people to take on board issues associated with disability”.

The concerns over ‘detail’ centre around two issues, definitions of disability and enforcement of the Act. For any Act of Parliament, definition of the subject is crucial to decide who is included and therefore covered by the Act and who is not included and so not covered. There was a lengthy battle over the definition of disability in the DDA, something that the charity ‘Mind’ took part in, “We worked hard to get mental health history included in the definition”. And ‘Scope’ is concerned that even with the broadening of the definition, “it leaves out perceived disability which is a big problem”. Scope’s point here is that a person who has been diagnosed as, say, having multiple sclerosis, but who as yet shows no symptoms, would not be included in the definition and protected by the Act. ‘Mind’ emphasises this by arguing,

“The definition’s fairly narrow so you may or may not when it comes down to it be regarded as disabled under the Act ... There are a lot of holes to fall through”.

Coming down on the wrong side of the Act's definition of disability means that a person is not protected by the Act and so can be discriminated against in employment. But even if a person is defined as disabled they are not protected against discrimination in every circumstance, as in some professions discrimination is 'justified' (for example, the armed forces and the prison service) and additionally companies with less than 20 employees are exempt from the legislation. The TUC sees this as unacceptable as the Act, in outlawing discrimination against the disabled people it includes, is therefore making legal (or more accurately, not illegal) discrimination against those disabled people not included,

"The TUC is extremely unhappy about the DDA's concept of 'justifiable discrimination' against disabled people. In our view such discrimination can never be justified ... This Act for the first time legalises discrimination against disabled people".

The FSB defends the exemption of firms with less than 20 employees, not accepting that it allows them to discriminate, but arguing that it is simply a lack of support and information which stops them employing disabled people,

"[Small] employers are frightened to do the wrong thing and so they won't take people on".

There is a more fundamental issue around the definition of disability. The disability campaigning organisations and many other groups challenged the whole way that the definition was conceived. They claimed that the understanding of disability that Government had was based on the 'individual pathology' model of disability, which centres the cause and responsibility on the individual.³⁹ The TUC was one of the other groups to hold this position,

"The definition of disability is inadequate. It is a medical rather than a social model. All these regulations that the Government has brought out to bring people into the definition or keep others out, is all down to the fact that they didn't start with the social model".

The medical model therefore defines disability in terms of the impairment and 'inability' of an individual, while a social definition would begin with issues of access to employment and society more generally. The basis for the definition of disability has implications for how the DDA works. This connects to the second issue on the DDA, the enforcement of the Act. The 'individual' definition of disability in the DDA has a

³⁹ Details of the debate on the 'individual pathology' and 'social' models of disability are in Chapter Three.

material result in that disabled people are required to make their own case against discrimination. As 'Scope' comments,

"The legislation is a step forward, but because it's down to the individual disabled person [to take the case through] it's not going to be earth-shattering".

The TEC National Council is disappointed with the absence of a strong enforcement body, such as the Equal Opportunities Commission,⁴⁰ stating bluntly that, "we are disappointed with the final version ... it doesn't have enough teeth". Mencap, the mental disability charity, supports this,

"This Act will not have much effect on the employment options for most of the people we work with. It's not been given the teeth",

and then broadens the discussion,

"Unless the people we work with have the appropriate support and training then they will fail".

The BCODP also argues that the Act cannot work in such isolation from many important issues, particularly stressing educational opportunity. The enactment of the DDA saw the simultaneous demise of the 'Quota', a supposedly legal level of disabled employees in an organisation's workforce. It was undoubtedly a failure,⁴¹ but perhaps represented a different, social model, understanding of disability. 'Mind' argues this point,

"We're not exactly fans of the Quota, but we did argue for not getting rid of it. We argued for there needing to be some collective way of showing how employers were doing, it is unacceptable simply to have a system based on individuals, there should be some quota target".

So the DDA definition and enforcement perhaps display a strong reinforcement of the long-standing understanding of disability as an individual, rather than social, issue.⁴²

7.5.2 *The benefit system and employment schemes*

The previous section, in its discussion on flexible employment, hinted that the social security benefits system plays a crucial role in the employment situation for disabled people, indeed for all potential employees. The benefits system for disabled

⁴⁰ Interestingly, neither the EOC or the Commission for Racial Equality have strict definitions for sex and race - it could be argued that they begin with a 'social model' of understanding.

⁴¹ See Chapter One for details of the debate around the 'Quota'.

⁴² Both the social and individual models of disability, however, operate within the main discursive formation of disability and employment.

people was detailed in Chapter One, but it is worth reiterating several points here. Firstly, the matter of benefits for people classified as disabled is a central part of the disability debate. There is an essential divide between the idea of 'dependence' and 'independence', the former assuming that disabled people require support from the state and/or are entitled to it, the latter assuming that they either do not require it or are not entitled to it. This is a prickly issue for the state and for disability campaigners, because both would ideally assert that independence for disabled people - where they would earn their own incomes and have access to facilities in the same way as everyone else - is the ideal situation, while both know that this is not possible and that some form of dependence is essential. Perhaps both would change the term 'dependence' to 'support'.

The second point follows on from the first, and is concerned with the concept of a 'disability income', a proposal for a payment to disabled people to compensate for the lack of employment opportunities. This has been championed for many years by the 'Disability Income Group', on the basis that if disabled people could not be financially independent, even though they wished to be, then society, via the state, must make this independence possible. Thirdly, there is the issue of disabled people in employment and how the benefits system has dealt with this. The last few years have seen significant changes in attitude and in the system of benefits for employed disabled people. With the dual purpose of reducing state dependence (particularly expenditure) and increasing individual independence, the benefits system has moved away from benefits to keep people in their homes and introduced a system that is designed to support people in work, initially with the 'Disability Working Allowance' and later with 'Access to Work'. The former is designed to support a disabled person's income from potentially fewer hours in work than an able-bodied person and the latter to provide equipment or expertise to enable a disabled person to do a job effectively. The latter, in particular, has been extremely successful and, almost uniquely in recent disability history, is supported by companies, disability organisations and Government. Its success is down to two things: firstly, its intention to make disabled people as employable as an able-bodied person by 'levelling out' the differences through the use of equipment or specialised services (such as sign interpreters); secondly, it manages to balance the two schools of thought,

dependence and independence, by blending the demands of the employee (for the equal chance to do the job) and the employer (for cover of the costs involved in employing that person). The most recent change, the new rules and tests for Invalidity Benefit, is understood by many to be a step too far, as it focuses on the person rather than the job they wish to do and seems to have the purpose of taking people out of the labour force.

Amongst the organisations, there is an overall sense that benefits are a very significant barrier to disabled people gaining and keeping a job. Mencap argues,

“one of the biggest factors that is stopping all people with a disability from getting work is the benefit situation”.

It is a very simple barrier that is in operation, one of money, as Mind argues in a policy document,

“starting a new job involves risking loss of entitlement to higher rate benefits [and] if it doesn’t work out...”.

In a flexible labour market the issue of benefits increasingly comes into play, particularly as benefits have yet to catch up with what is going on in employment. The BCODP sees the problem as follows,

“Flexible working usually means part-time working, and once you get into that you’ve got part-time wages, and once you get part-time wages, you lose out on benefits”.

The implication of their argument is that many disabled people will actually lose money if they work and so will decide to remain outside employment. The ‘Disabled Working Allowance’ was an attempt to counter this, to bridge the gap between part-time work and benefits, but it has had little success, due to lack of funding and an overcomplex application procedure. ‘Mind’ still feels that there is a need to, “help people combine work and benefits flexibly”. This will certainly continue to be an issue, as Governments struggle to balance financial constraints with the new rights of disabled people in employment and the broader debate that encompasses it, that of ‘dependence’ versus ‘independence’ for disabled people.

Access to Work, as stated above, has been a significant success for Government, companies and disabled people. The TUC sees this as a strange alliance, based on an argument which doesn’t really make sense,

“It’s interesting that people who support the business case, or the rights case, do support some schemes such as Access to Work, which is very difficult to justify on an equal opportunities basis”.

The 'business' case and the 'rights' case named here fit quite neatly with the discourses of disability and employment in section 7.3. The business case should really oppose a scheme such as Access to Work as it distorts the labour market and the rights case should see the scheme as supporting differential treatment for disabled people rather than true equality. Of the three discourses only the 'practicalities' one would whole-heartedly support such a scheme, as it enables disabled people to get into work. However, the keenness with which companies have taken up Access to Work and the support given by disability organisations, must mean that such a measure marks a possible new understanding that support, be it financial or material, is essential for some disabled to get and/or keep employment.

There is a concern, however, that Access to Work may be reduced in scope and size, or stopped altogether, now that there is anti-discrimination legislation. The TUC claims that,

"when the DDA comes in the Government may try and save money by limiting Access to Work ... [which will] undermine the effectiveness of the new legislation".

And the BCODP uses the rights case to emphasise the point,

"If you say on the one hand that employers can't discriminate against disabled people, then logically why do you need special support to get disabled people into work? They have argued that now we have anti-discrimination legislation, there will be no need for certain parts of Access to Work".

This is an acceptance that practices of what could be branded 'positive discrimination' have to work alongside anti-discrimination legislation and alongside the operation of the labour market. In other words, support for disabled employees is essential. If Access to Work challenges the discourses of disability and employment, how does it affect the larger discursive formation, that disability *and* employment are an 'impossibility'? It does still mark out disabled people as different, employees who require something extra, over and above their 'able-bodied' colleague, to do the job. The real challenge is to begin to think about disability and ability in a more complex way, to try to deconstruct what this dualism means. For both this task and to debate the notion of 'support' for disabled people, the concept of embodiment is extremely useful. What 'embodiment' allows is a simultaneous and interconnected conceptualisation of disability and employment. So, on the second issue, there is a rethinking of employment that consists of complex processes

of personal involvement that may require support and, on the first issue, the ability-disability dualism is being challenged and blurred, while at the same time remaining strong and important. A debate around the nature of the dualism may allow a clearer understanding of the ‘impossibility’ of disability and employment.

7.6 The meaning of ability and disability

The definition and meaning of disability was a central theme in the previous section. In the same way that the definition of disability in the DDA influences the way Government approaches disability, so the understanding of disability in an organisation is crucially important to its style of operation.

7.6.1 Disability: common perceptions, different skills

There is a heightened awareness of ‘disability’ amongst many of the organisations. The DDA and the increased level of debate in society over impairment and disability have pushed organisations to respond. Of course, the disability organisations have always had disabled people at the centre of their concerns, but even for them there is a noticeable change, a more upbeat and open tone. More surprisingly, the employment organisations are now ‘tuned into’ the debate over disability. This is not simply an automatic reaction to the DDA and self-education as a defence against prosecution, but something more. I am not suggesting that there is a wholesale change in attitude and policy towards disabled people in employment amongst the organisations interviewed, but there is an openness to debate that was not there before. Of course there are strong political, tactical and economic forces running through this debate; none of the opinions discussed below are innocent of a particular interest.

The FSB stresses that not enough is known about disability and in particular about its role in employment and productivity,

“Many people see disability as a special case - they don’t understand what effect disability has on the ability to do the job”.

Unlike many organisations, the RNIB accepts that there is an issue around disability and productivity (as discussed in 7.3), but that disability can be an advantage to some people,

“You might lose 10 per cent productivity on an individual, but you actually gain a lot in terms of the insight they give you, and they make the rest of your staff behave better and more responsibly”.

The TEC National Council supports this view, using the example of a hearing-impaired employee at a TEC, “Her disability probably helps her because she’s not distracted”. So, here disability is understood as something different, something that can give a person different skills even though the price of this is a loss of ‘normal’ productivity. The employment relation has to be thought about in a different way, as the value of a person to a company is measured not simply in productivity terms, but in ‘extra skills’ terms too.

The RNIB goes on to stress that this is not the usual situation, instead,

“the common perception is that once you’ve got a disability you can only do menial tasks, as if having a disability means that all your abilities disappear as well”.

7.6.2 A ‘blurring’ of ability and disability?

The previous section concluded with a consideration of the ability-disability dualism. It argued that the discursive formation of the impossibility of disability *and* employment was based on this dualism and if disability and ability could be thought about differently then the formation could be challenged.

As a first step, we can consider the TEC National Council’s argument on the variability of disability and ability,

“There is a spectrum [with disability] as there is a spectrum with any group of people in terms of ‘ability’. What we’re trying to do with employers is to try and focus on the ability, not on the disability, and in that way you’re recognising the person as an individual and what they can do for your company and then judging them on the same criteria as any other prospective employee”.

They are seeing ‘ability’ *within* disability and by focusing on the ‘individual’ are taking the disabled person out of the group marked ‘disability’. So, in this way of thinking, is there still something called ‘disability’? The TEC National Council would probably answer ‘no’, as it now uses the approach of ‘diversity’ in its employment policy-making,

“[Managing diversity] is the next stage on from equal opportunities ... you look at the needs of all the people in your organisation because you’ve got a diverse staff, and you start from the individual, whereas equal opportunities starts from groups ... Everyone may have particular need, and that needs to be accounted for”.

So, potentially, everyone is disabled, no-one is able-bodied, the dualism becomes redundant.

'Mind', the mental health charity, uses work-related stress as a 'way into' its work for able-bodied people. A recent poster campaign by the charity sums up their approach with the slogan, 'You don't have to be mentally ill to suffer from mental illness', i.e. *mental health issues affect many more people than just those clinically diagnosed* (a good challenge to the definition of disability and the DDA). 'Mind' argues,

"There's probably more awareness in relation to stress at work, and this is where the edges [between ability and disability] blur ... Stress is a good way into employers in terms of mental health awareness because everyone thinks they know about it. ... A 'stress audit' is a mental health audit and it might be one way of connecting the two worlds".

There is need here to temper the above debate. There is no doubt that there is a debate within the organisations around the meaning of disability and ability and that all employees will at one time or another have particular mental and physical needs. 'Mind's' focus on stress as a possible way of thinking about a 'blurring' between ability and disability is an exciting debate. However, 'Scope' argues that there is something *distinct about disability, for two reasons. Firstly,*

"Disability is different [from sex and race] and it is difficult. What is disability for a start? I think that's the big difference actually, the actual physical changing of things is costly".

So, a disabled person does have different needs and there are implications for employment; it is 'difficult' for the employee and employer, there can be a loss in productivity, changes to the workplace may have to be made. Secondly, disability and ability cannot simply become redundant because of one simple thing - *history*. That is, disability as a concept and experience is not something that comes one day and goes the next. Attitudes are deeply embedded in society and within policy-making (as we know from the discussion on the discursive formation) and disabled people are not just involved in an employment relation, they have experiences from right across life and from across their life. 'Scope' again,

"I think the main problem is this: you go through special schools, you go into residential homes, that's what you do. You don't *consider* going out to work. If you become disabled later on, when you've actually been through the mainstream, it's a different experience".

To put it simply, a disabled person cannot swiftly 'blur' into an able-bodied person and vice versa. There are too many experiences, histories and attitudes for that to happen. We

can connect this back to the discussion in section 7.3.3 where it was argued that the body is deeply 'imprinted' by the processes of work. The body holds within it the many processes, social relations and power relations that constitute the employment process. It is through 'reading' the body that the 'history' of 'ability' and 'disability' will be revealed. The TUC puts it this way,

"We would say that impairments are real, they're not just a social construction. Disability's a social construction, but impairments become real socially, and there is an underlying physical reality behind it. If you have an impairment that other people you are competing against in the labour market do not have, then that restricts, even in a non-discriminatory society, the number of opportunities open to you. Therefore one would expect that in a non-discriminatory society, disabled people would tend to have a worse labour market experience as a group".

'Disability', whether we understand it as an identity, as a group of people, as a source of discrimination, or as a physical and mental difference, is a material thing. Whatever the debate over the 'blurring' of able and disabled identities, for people with impairments there are serious and very real issues of discrimination and oppression to be faced.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to discover the way that 'disability and employment' is represented and understood by a selection of organisations from across the disability and employment debate. There are several points to make in conclusion to draw the chapter together.

Firstly, the understandings or 'discourses' of disability are produced by the complex power relations of the organisations. Representations of disability in policy statements and in the interviews came not just from the centre, but were produced across the network of the organisation. The messages of power too were not transmitted unchanged from the centre, but rather were translated or interpreted across the network. The meanings of 'disability' and 'employment' are a major focus for debate in the organisational arena.

Secondly, the relationship between disability and employment is a highly complex one, to a large extent because of the different understandings of the terms. The organisations battle over the meaning of the relationship, but the whole debate takes place within a broader framework of understanding. This 'discursive formation', the

'impossibility' of the relationship between disability and employment, is the systematic way that the issue is understood and it is very difficult to think about it in any other way. The processes of 'flexible' employment do not challenge this overall formation, but rather further complicate the picture.

Thirdly, the concept of the 'body' and embodiment. The body is a useful way of thinking about disability and employment because it allows a certain 'rootedness' or 'depth' of the relationship to be thought about. The body, as the chapter argues, 'captures' the processes of employment for disabled people. An interpretation of this 'imprinting' of the body makes the relationship between disability and employment both material and located. And it challenges any easy postmodern notion of a 'blurring' of identity boundaries between disability and ability.

This chapter has shown that the discourses of the organisations are important. Important in that they have 'real' effects on disabled employees lives and important because they raise more fundamental issues of identity, oppression and justice.

Chapter Eight Spaces of employment and disability in the companies: an embodied approach

8.1 Introduction

Chapter Seven considered the understanding and representation of the relationship between disability and employment in the 'organisations'. The central conclusion was that there is a possible discursive formation around the disability-employment relationship, a formation that sees the relationship as a fundamental impossibility. Using an 'embodied approach', the formation was then critiqued and developed, emphasising *the uncertain and contested nature of both elements of the formation*.

This discussion will now be pushed a little bit further. A company is the 'interface' between an employee and employment. It is the place of negotiation where the 'nitty gritty' of employment relations take place and where the debate around the themes and relations of 'disability' and 'employment' are 'worked out'. Chapter Six, in outlining the plan and purpose of the research, stressed the importance of this 'apex'. This present chapter will consider the ways in which the themes and relations of disability and employment are understood and represented in the three selected companies, at national and local 'levels' (the local being Manchester). In particular, the chapter will consider the changing nature of employment practices (the possible moves to 'flexible' working) and how this is interacting with the changing nature of disability. The research's central issue, i.e. the implications for disabled people of flexible employment practices, will be tackled through this analysis.

The overall argument of the chapter is that an embodied approach to the spatialised understanding and reproduction of 'disability' and 'employment' in the companies can develop a clearer understanding of the positions and experiences of disabled people in flexible employment.

The chapter is structured as follows: the first substantive section will describe and discuss the employment practices of the three companies, drawing out the potential implications of changing employment for disabled employees and overall the representations and understandings of 'disability' and 'employment'. Following that,

‘Spaces of employment and disability I’ will consider the space of the workplace and how an embodied approach can be used to discuss the production and reproduction of disability and employment. ‘Spaces of employment and disability II’ describes and discusses how the companies operate across the spatiality of the ‘national’ and ‘local’, and how the understandings of ‘disability’ and ‘employment’ are (re)produced across space.

8.2 The companies and flexible employment

This section will describe and discuss the operations, structures and employment practices of the companies in the research.⁴³ There have, as Chapter Five argued, been significant changes in the UK labour market in the last 5 to 10 years, in both ideological and practical terms. The three companies chosen for the research have been involved in this ‘move to flexibility’ *and* have been significant ‘promoters’ of employment opportunities for disabled people.

8.2.1 *New employment practices: an example*

The banking company has recently (February 1997) undertaken a relaunch of its corporate brand, products and services. The advertisement in broadsheet newspapers is a useful ‘vignette’ of some of the recent changes in employment practices in the three selected companies, although the changes affect each company in slightly different ways (see Figure 1).

The advertisement shows a cross-sectional drawing of a ‘typical’ newly-designed branch of the banking company. The focus of the advertisement is on how customer service will be the new priority, ‘We have taken steps to ensure our customers receive the highest possible level of service’. The reader of the advertisement is then invited to ‘take the time to look around’.

⁴³ The three companies will not be named, as this was part of the agreement for interviews and access. Instead, they will be described by their main function, i.e. the ‘media company’, the ‘communications company’ and the ‘banking company’.

Welcome to the new Central Bank

You'll notice that we're introducing a smart new corporate identity. But the changes at Central are more than superficial. We've taken a series of steps to ensure our customers receive the highest possible level of service. Please take the time to look around:

New Corporate Identity

The old 'Monster' symbol is being replaced by the new 'Square' symbol, recognising our membership of the BCD Group, one of the world's largest banking and financial services organisations. Eventually the new symbol will appear on everything from our stationery to your chequebooks.

Experienced Managers

have been put back into branches where our customers need them most. Now more of our decisions can be made in the 'but'

New Products

like the highly-acclaimed Central Bank Account which has a no-fee overdraft and a £50 buffer zone.

500 New Cash Machines

have been added to our network. Our card holders now have access to 12,000 cash machines in the UK and over 235,000 worldwide.

New Interiors

All our branches have been refurbished, making them more modern, comfortable and, we hope, more attractive environments.

Putting Customers First

and as a result our customer satisfaction is at an all-time high.

Better Trained People

In the last year all our 45,000 staff have undergone a comprehensive training programme to improve their customer service skills.

Financial Planning Managers

Our team of professionally-qualified Financial Planning Managers can offer expert, impartial advice across our full range of home, finance, life assurance and investment products.

Figure 1 New employment practices: an example

The image of a bank employee talking to a customer is used to emphasise the strategy of 'Putting Customers First' and how this is to be achieved by the staff being 'Better Trained People'. All of the bank's staff, for instance, have 'undergone a comprehensive training programme to improve their customer service skills'. The make-up of the staff in the branch is changing too: some staff members have been trained to be 'professionally-qualified Financial Planning Managers', who are in the branch to 'offer expert financial advice across our full range of home finance, life assurance and investment products'. Standing at the *centre* of the drawing is the branch's manager, representing the bank's commitment to 'put managers back into the branches where our customers need them most'.

The re-orientation of the bank's 'products' also reflects changes in employment practice. The low number of staff pictured in the branch and the customer using the external cash machine together represent the divide of the bank's operations between branches - now effectively 'shops' for the bank's products - and 'satellite offices' where the cash machine network is co-ordinated and where the processing work (formerly done in the branch 'back-room') is done.

There are huge implications for employment practice from this visual statement of company policy. Firstly, *all* staff, through the training programme, have customer interaction and service as the central part of their jobs; the use of the word 'skills' makes it clear that the bank understands that a skilled workforce is key to its operation. Secondly, the divide between the branch 'shop' and the satellite processing office (and also call centres - see 8.2.3) has divided the staff in terms of jobs, skills, direct customer interaction, location and, most obviously from the advertisement, visibility. The 'front of house' staff in the branches are required to be multi-skilled, customer-friendly, with self-managerial skills, while the staff 'out the back' in the satellite offices are involved in more routine, single-skilled work, with no or specific contact with customers, plus the added element of physical separation.

Lastly, the advertisement makes great play of the banking company's new corporate logo, which reflects its ownership by a global finance house. It is clear that

employment practice is not a purely national issue, as all three companies are part of the international division of labour.

This advertisement sets up the rest of this section. The issues that emerge - corporate restructuring and changing employment practices - will be discussed below.

8.2.2 *The operations of the companies*

The 'communications company' has a very large UK operation, with a turnover of over £14 million in 1996 and significant growth over the last five years.⁴⁴ The company claims it is 'one of the world's leading providers of telecommunications services'. Its main products and services are local, long-distance and international calls; telephone lines, equipment and private circuits for homes and businesses; providing and managing private networks; and supplying mobile communications services. And it is involved in the new developments in communications technology such as financial services, media, and computer data transfer. It describes its overseas operations, in the Annual Report 1996, as, 'a global strategy', involving a 'joint venture in the United States [worth] 1 billion dollars' and a 'significant presence in most of the major markets [in Europe]'.

At the same time, the number of employees has fallen dramatically, from 210,000 in 1992 to 130,000 in 1996.⁴⁵ The 1996 portion of the reduction in staff was described in the Annual Report as 'another eventful 12 months' and the company claims that 'most of the downsizing exercise is now behind us'. In the 'Annual Review 1995/96', the staff cuts are analysed as follows, 'The company prides itself on the fact that this reduction in numbers has been achieved on a voluntary basis'. The result, claims the Chairman, is that 'We have a talented management team and a committed workforce'. The Chief Executive stresses the company's need to be 'more flexible, more decisive and more accountable'. And internally, he continues, this means 'I am introducing trading units, with individual managers having much greater responsibility and accountability for their profit and loss performance'. And possibly as a reassurance to the remaining workforce, he claimed that 'there were major development and training opportunities'.

⁴⁴ A turnover of over £14 million and a profit of £3 million, in 1996.

⁴⁵ Number of employees in the intervening years: 1993: 170,000; 1994: 156,000; 1995: 137,500.

The 'banking company' has a nationwide UK operation as a high-street bank, but is part of a global finance house.⁴⁶ The UK operation increased its profits by a significant amount in 1995/96, to £439 million. One of the main elements of this growth has been a rapid take-up by customers of the bank's telephone banking service (see 8.2.3). In its Annual Report, the bank states that its operating costs are continuing to fall, 'with the bank starting to benefit from its long-running efficiency drive' (The Guardian, 1996c). Part of this 'efficiency drive' has been a reduction in employees, with 553 exiting in 1996, leaving 43,019 (full-time equivalents) staff at the end of 1996. The Annual Report 1996 states that this cut was due to 'the necessary reorganisation of branch operations and streamlining of head office activities' and it was achieved 'where possible through natural staff turnover, early retirement, redeployment and voluntary redundancy'. The relatively small cut in 1996 has, however, been preceded by larger reductions, for example in November 1995 the bank announced that another 2,500 staff were to go as part of a 'strategic overhaul' (The Guardian, 1996c).

This is part of the wider employment shifts in the financial industry - between 1989 and 1996 150,000 jobs have been cut, with NatWest and Barclays shedding 25,000 jobs each. The banking union Bifu claims that another 20,000 jobs could be lost in 1996/97 (The Guardian, 1996d). The job losses have come about in several ways (echoing the banking company's Annual Report comments): there have been 'efficiency savings' in branches, programmes of early retirement, plus the more significant and long-term process of closing branches, reducing staff in the remaining branches and taking processing out of branch back-rooms into large out-of-town processing centres. The 'big four' high-street banks - Barclays, Midland, NatWest and Lloyds - together closed 2,000 branches between 1989 and 1994. The banking company in the research went from just over 2,000 branches to about 1,700 branches between 1989 and 1996. Information technology has played an important part in these changes, including telephones, computers, cash machines and, to a limited extent, tele-working.

⁴⁶ The global finance house had profits of £2.32 billion in 1995/96, an increase of 34 per cent on the previous year.

The 'media company' is a large national operator, with its headquarters in London, and regional bases in six major locations (Edinburgh, Cardiff, Belfast, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol), plus many smaller sites. In the last few years the company's international operation has expanded rapidly, with an increase in profit from £53 million to £77 million between 1994/95 and 1995/96. In 1996 major changes took place within the company, with an all-encompassing corporate restructuring. At national and regional levels posts were 'streamlined' and amalgamated, and there has been the creation of an 'internal 'market' in the company, saving, it is claimed, £500 million over the five years from 1991 to 1996 (The Guardian, 1996e).

However, it is also claimed that the restructuring is about more than saving money; it is about responding to the demands of the consumer, making the company more accountable, efficient, responsive to change and changing the whole 'culture' from one of complacency and 'pleasant inefficiency' to one of team working and 'creative play' (The Guardian, 1996e). The corporate restructuring at the media company has involved the running of 'strands' through the company's structure, these 'strands' being the different functions of the company. The research was undertaken while these changes were still going on, so the situation was (and still is) uncertain, 'No decisions have been taken about staff numbers, ... the individual department structures, and about where teams should be located' (*ibid.*). So, while the significant staff reductions and changes have already happened in the banking and communications companies, the future of the staff in the media company is not clear. This situation is causing anxiety amongst the employees: a joint union survey of the staff in 1996 found that 86.9 per cent of staff did not feel secure in their jobs; a union official commented, 'There is a crisis of confidence among the company's staff and it reflects insecurity and even demoralisation' (media company staff newspaper, November 1996). A senior executive of the company responded through a newspaper to these concerns, 'I know that disaffection among the staff is still widespread. The process of making economies may have been too dragged out and the nerves of people worn too thin. But let's also remember that the economies are to do with strengthening what counts ... The company's had to change, not for the

sake of change, but to survive and we have to go on changing. We've still got a lot of learning to do' (The Guardian, 1996e).

The three companies have major UK operations, employing large numbers of people and generating significant turnover and profits. All have London national headquarters, but with a strong representation, through branches, staff and operations, across the UK. All three are also expanding their operations internationally, or are already part of a global business. However, of particular interest to this research is the way that the companies are *restructuring* their workforces. All three have made significant reductions in staff, but perhaps more significantly in the long run, they have made changes in the way work is organised, structured and, just as importantly, understood and represented. These changes will be considered in more detail below.

There are three aspects to the *restructuring* issue. Firstly, there has been a shift from a central and geographical structure, to a functionally-based structure. What this means is that rather than there being a central (mostly London) headquarters and then regional headquarters, with policy made at the centre and then operated in the regional areas, there has been a shift towards separating or 'stranding' the different functions of the companies *across* the country. So, for instance, the communications company has four 'operating divisions' covering its main functions (such as, 'Personal Communications' and 'National Business Communications'), supported by other structures such as 'Group Personnel' and 'Group Finance' - i.e. rather than each section or region having their own personnel or finance divisions there is an all-encompassing one. The title 'group' is symbolic of the whole change - the concept of the company as a *group of functions*, with its notion of individual operation, yet at the same time part of a coherent whole. The company continues to operate through its regional structure, with the national headquarters still at the centre. The Manchester representative of the communications company described these changes as making the company, "a seamless organisation", which he thought, "[all companies are] moving towards". The media company representative in Manchester described the new structure as follows,

“instead of a geographical distribution, there is now a functional distribution and the local and network programmes will be in a different structure” [and it personally affects me - because of the restructuring] “my job as blah-blah in the North region will no longer exist”.

What will this aspect of restructuring mean for the understanding of employment? There are a number of issues here: firstly, the companies are perhaps trying to standardise their employment practice, in an attempt to get away from local ‘variations’ in employment policy making and actions. Secondly, the notion of ‘function’ raises the idea of employment within the companies being pushed more towards direct output. And thirdly, this aspect of restructuring emphasises the ‘individual’ nature of employment, i.e. the section and therefore people within that section, acting independently and being responsible for their own issues and tasks. There is an overall disruption of the meaning of ‘employment’ and ‘the employee’. There is a pervading sense of constant change in the demands and expectations of employment, a lack of stability and an increasing feeling of insecurity. Employees are simultaneously being encouraged to be individual and responsible *and* be subject to overall management control, often from afar. We shall see below that this is all part of what many companies understand as a necessary ‘change of culture’.

The second aspect to restructuring has involved the decentralisation of much decision-making and the establishment of individual cost centres. For the banking company this means that, “decision-making is done at the nearest point of problem-solving”. This has meant several things for this company: one is that every branch, on the structure side, “is now a stand alone unit which is responsible for its own activities” and on the financial side it now, as the Manchester representative commented,

“runs its own profit and loss account ... The responsibility is much greater that it ever used to be ... We’re totally responsible for our own business”.

The branch is very much on its own, gaining rights of operation, but at the same time being loaded with significant responsibilities. The media company has had a similar experience. The London representative stated that the company is now run as,

“lots of small ‘business units’, each managed on a profit and loss account, each with its own budget”.

Together these changes - the ‘functional’ stranding of the companies operations, and the decentralisation of decision-making and budget-holding - are a shift to a structure

which pins certain functions (and not others) to certain people and groups. It both gains control from regional centres, placing it in centrally-based functional units *and* hands control to small 'business units', which have no clear regional affiliation. As the Manchester representative of the banking company said,

"We are a very big branch in the bank's overall network".

Such 'connecting' of people and responsibilities is an important part of the changing understanding of what work is within the companies, i.e. work as an individually responsible practice, but as part of a broader expectation of what is to be done. That is, the pressure on employees comes from both sides, above and below. The developing 'understanding' of work is also, importantly, part of what the companies are trying to do in terms of their overall change.

Thirdly, these restructuring changes, which have fundamentally reshaped the three companies in the research, have been made possible to a large degree by a broader change in the 'culture' of the companies. Senior managers in the companies have argued for, and pushed through, the changes that have been described above, in an attempt to change, for the long-term, the *way* that the companies operate and the role of the employees in this. A senior executive in the media company has been quoted above as arguing that the company had to incorporate change as a continual process, so transforming the whole culture of the business. Salaman (1997) argues that senior managers are convinced that changing the 'Corporate Culture' of an organisation is an effective way of improving economic performance. The focus of this change in culture is, Salaman proposes, the company's employees. The 'gurus' of corporate culturism, Peters and Waterman, argued that large companies (in the USA) were being stifled by bureaucracy and overmanagement (1982). They said that attempts at control were a waste of time, instead companies should 'use' the 'humanity' of their employees to create a shared vision of what the organisation should be. Wilmott (1993) put it as follows,

"Corporate culturism expects and requires employees to internalise the new values of 'quality', 'flexibility' and 'value-added' - to adopt and cherish them as their own - so that, in principle, their uniquely human powers of judgement and discretion are directed unequivocally towards working methods that will deliver capital accumulation" (p.519).

Chapter Five discussed this 'culturing' of the economy, arguing that the economy has always been deeply cultural, but only now have companies begun to realise the importance of meaning and representation in their approach to employment.

Salaman identifies three 'narratives' or themes of this new corporate culture which reflect the way that a lot of management thinks about, and acts, within companies: first, the organisation as unitary, with employees sharing key values and purposes and employees empowered to make decisions. Second, employees as enterprising and customer-focused with employees as individualistic, self-regulating, autonomous and responsible. Third, the employee and the organisation thought of 'as one', so the healthy organisation like the healthy individual must be 'responsible' or 'flexible' to the changing world around it. These three narratives are 'embodied' in the advertisement for the banking company, discussed in 8.2.1, first, the newly trained staff with new decision-making responsibilities, second, the emphasis on customer service and multi-skilled staff and, third, the representation of the bank's staff as *being* the company. In the latter there is an emphasis on high levels of customer service and 'Putting Customers First' as values for the company and at the same time what the employee must *do*. It is important to argue, here, that the 'body' is central to this discussion, or rather, the notion of 'embodiment' is central. Chapter Five argued that an embodied approach to employment practice and in particular the 'new' practices of flexible employment, could allow a more complex understanding of employment to be developed. By getting 'inside' the practices of the employment relation and the simultaneous individual and social nature of employment - centred in the body - we can begin to speculate on the implications of changing employment practices for all employees, including disabled employees (see 8.3). An embodied approach also allows an analysis of the way that the companies understand what employment is and how employment should be.

The 'cultural restructuring' of the three companies has had a massive impact on the employment relations process and on the situation for disability and employment. At the same time as the restructuring has been happening, all three companies have maintained, and even bolstered, their equal opportunities policies, including the disability element. The Annual Report of the banking company (1996), for example, announced

over 2,000 staff cuts (5 per cent of the workforce) in 1995 and in the same document a few pages on, stated that, 'The bank is committed to providing equal opportunities in employment. The employment of disabled persons is included in this commitment and the recruitment, training, career development and promotion of disabled persons are based on the aptitudes and abilities of the individual'. The following sub-section will consider the major employment practices involved in the restructuring process and discuss their possible implications for the companies' equal opportunities policies as well as their disabled employees.

8.2.3 *Changing employment practices*

Three changes in employment practice can be identified within the overall restructuring process in the companies, most significantly 'flexibility' and also 'downsizing' and 'satellite operations'. All three have become 'buzzwords' of the last 5 to 10 years of corporate management and employment practice.

The most important change in employment practice has been the implementation of 'flexible' employment practices. As has already been explained in Chapter Five, flexible employment encompasses a wide range of labour market practices, but perhaps most significantly in respect of the three companies, it has meant the shift to part-time workers (and the contemporaneous reduction in full-time workers), the expectation of multi-skilling and the rise in employment insecurity. All three companies are using a higher proportion of part-time, or what the banking company calls 'key-time',⁴⁷ employees and have seen a reduction in their full-time employees, but perhaps not to the extent that the media and 'corporate gurus' have predicted (The Guardian, 1996f; Handy, 1994). The banking company stated unequivocally that,

"of course flexible working is what the workforce is going to be like in the coming years".

It is important to 'unpack' such a complex issue as 'flexibility' as there are many different issues wrapped up within it. Firstly, different types of flexibility can be identified: in the media company there were considered to be two types - *formal* flexible working arrangements, such as part-time working, and *informal* flexibility, i.e.

⁴⁷ Between 10am and 4pm.

individuals managing their own time. The former type is used by the media company in clerical work, by the banking company for some branch staff and in their processing centres and as clerical and call centre staff in the communications company. So, the first type of flexibility is for particular kinds of workers in particular parts of the company.

The media company representative in London concedes that while,

“flexible working practices are open to everybody, the usage varies dramatically between different work groups”.

The first type of flexibility, she continued, can actually,

“lead to things being more regimented than true flexibility should be”.

The second type of flexibility, as identified by the media company, is using the time within the standard ‘40 hour week’ contract in different ways, with the task(s) to be done directing the time organisation of the work within that 40 hours (but often more hours are worked). This latter type of flexibility is used by different people from the former type, in quite separate parts of the media company - for example, by those involved in the production of programmes, who, because of the unpredictable nature of the job, sometimes have to work a 20 hour day and at other times have a short day. In the other companies it is management who are increasingly using this type of flexibility, as it is difficult to have part-time managers because of the need for consistency of work. For managers, ‘flexibility’ is likely to mean increased hours, with the ‘compensation’ of increased autonomy. The Manchester representative of the media company saw the second ‘type’ of flexibility as becoming the norm in this area of industry,

“[This business] is about self-managed teams in essence and in one sense there are few people in this organisation who aren’t managers. We are increasingly moving away from fixed schedules and rotas to where we pay people inclusive salaries and we expect them to take more responsibility for organising their time and delivering product on time. These are the areas where we are looking at flexible working. There’s a whole load of experiments going on and the industry does lend itself to that”.

So, the concept of ‘flexible working’ means (at least) two different things within the three companies. This becomes a major issue when these two types of flexibility come into contact and potential conflict. For example, a manager (operating on the second type of flexibility) and a secretary (operating on the first type) come together on a task that needs attention, say, at the end of the day. For the secretary, the day, signalled by the end of their (say) part-time slot, has ended, but for the manager there is still work

to be done - a letter to be sent, a contract to be set up. The central conditions of all flexible working are, according to the media company's London representative, firstly that,

“people can work whenever they like as long as they fulfil their contractual obligations”, and she added, all opportunities for flexible working are “subject to operational requirements”. In our hypothetical example we can see these central conditions in conflict: both the manager and the secretary are fulfilling their ‘contractual obligations’, but as a consequence ‘operational requirements’ are not being satisfied. The issue is that the two types of flexibility do not fit together. The media company again saw this as a significant problem,

“One thing we’ve not quite got together yet is the dilemma posed that one person’s flexibility is another person’s inconvenience”, and that at present to make them work required, “a lot of give and take” on both sides. So, for flexible working practices it is the issues of choice and power in the workplace - within the now small, locally-managed unit - that determines its usage and more broadly its meaning and representation within the company. The London representative of the media company concluded importantly that,

“in some ways flexibility has not quite achieved the goals for everybody at a proportionate rate”. There are three issues here: firstly, flexibility has become a cause of ‘stickiness’ in many companies, where the expectations and demands of different employees come into conflict; secondly, we can see that employment practices become closely connected, become embedded in a job and in a person in the process of employment - within a framework of strict power relations around how different people are employed; thirdly, ‘flexibility’ is a phenomenon that needs to be viewed critically - it is used by the companies to present an organisation that is responsive to economic changes, but employment practices remain rigid in most areas.

Flexible working practices within all of the companies are ‘managed locally’. What this means is that each department or branch, under its managers, decides the pattern of working in that area, within a broad framework of policy set out by the headquarters. These frameworks are usually loose and the media company claims that “flexible working practices are open to everyone”, but combined with the management

imperative that “all [such] arrangements are subject to operational requirements”. The media company’s London representative sees this as a potential problem,

“There’s a bit of a dilemma to be honest about flexible working. The provision is there [i.e. everyone has the opportunity to do it], but it also needs to be subject to operational requirements. ... I think the secret is having a good relationship with your manager”.

So, in the end, the decision comes down to the ‘local’ manager, who is the one to define and attempt to balance, as best they see fit, the ‘provision’ of flexible working and the ‘operational requirements’. At the Manchester site of the media company, this strategy is echoed,

“We have been seeking to encourage flexible working and *we’ve tried not to define it too rigidly*. Flexibility is what suits an individual to do their work better. We can’t know your circumstances, but if you have a problem and you see your manager, we have a commitment to try and find a solution” (emphasis added).

The negotiation over flexible working is between the local manager and the employee, with the company giving general guidance, but no hard definition. The communications company prides itself on its adaptability to its employees’ requirements in relation to flexible working,

“what we tend to do is to look at each person and say what’s appropriate for that person. If that person is having difficulty fitting in with the normal working pattern in that group, then can we adjust it for them? We’ve been quite good at doing that”.

The company (in Manchester) emphasised again the crucial role of local managers in decisions over flexible working, in the decentralised organisational structure,

“We don’t get involved in the fine detail of it, we just advise the line manager. We’re trying to put line manager ownership on a lot of these things. Obviously we’re here for guidance, but at the end of the day the line manager has got to run these issues”.

It is clear from the above that the pattern of flexible working practices in each of the companies is highly uneven, across parts and spaces of the company and between people and job types. The decisions about who works flexibly and how are taken locally by managers and so rely on individual understandings of disability and the relation to employment. These decisions are also being taken on a case-by-case basis, so emphasising the *individual* nature of both disability and flexible employment.

The banking company has a different take on flexible working. Because of its ‘shop-like’ format (see Figure 1) it is essential for the bank that people are on the

premises, available to customers during the 'key time' hours. The London representative saw this as a restriction on flexibility for the bank's workers,

"It's much harder to get flexibility if you're working at a branch because you need to do those core hours".

The bank instead understands flexibility as being about the *adaptability* of staff, or their 'multi-skilling' ability. In Manchester,

"Flexibility is the key to us working now. The emphasis is on customer service. There are three parts of the bank: the counter, advisers out front and a few people out the back doing bits and pieces. Also, there's a lending team upstairs. The important thing is that if we get a queue at the counter we must get more people on the counter or we must get someone to encourage people to use the self-service machines. Similarly, if no-one's at the counter I would expect some of the cashiers to go round the back and ask for something to do. If lending had a lot on, I would expect someone to be flexible enough to go from the ground floor to the first floor to help out. The object is, although somebody maybe a 'cashier' or an 'adviser', if there is a bottleneck in the bank they've got to be flexible enough to know 'think customer, must do something'. That's what we're trying to get people to do. In the ideal world [everyone would be able to do everything]. We're not close to that yet. We have some people who can do every job. What we need is a lot more of those sort of people. When we recruit we look at adaptability and initiative".

The way that the banking company understands its employees and flexibility, then, is in terms of their ability to change to suit shifting demand. They are expected to 'embody' the skills of the job, such as 'think customer' and so learn to react 'naturally' to the demands of the work. It is a demanding regime and is presented by the company as such, with a strong implication for the kind of employees they want and don't want. The comment, 'We have some people who can do every job. What we need is a lot more of those sorts of people', reveals an expectation of the 'perfect' employee, when of course the company knows that this is an unrealistic expectation. It also reveals quite a strong line on disability, or more accurately what the company understands 'disability' to be: they see flexibility as being about movement, agility, independent action and multi-skilling, which are all elements of the dominant 'individual' understanding of disability. Disability and disabled people, I have argued in the research, include a broad range of experiences and situations. Indeed, the banking company probably has a significant number of disabled people already working in this supposedly 'ability-dominated' flexible workforce. So, at the same time as promoting a positive understanding of

disability through their equal opportunities policies, the company has a narrow view of what disability and ability, are.

The increased use of flexible working practices, both in terms of times and skills, and the decentralisation of decision-making has had enormous implications for the companies' equal opportunities policies and for their disabled employees. The companies' management is aware of the potential benefits and disbenefits of flexibility for disabled staff and are concerned at the loss of central control of equal opportunities policy implementation. The communications company representative in London concluded that,

"There is certainly a conflict between expectations of higher productivity from managers, *and* the expectation that they will carry on keeping disabled people in their own team who are not able to provide 100 per cent".

And the equal opportunities unit in the company can only do a limited amount,

"There is no answer to this, except by using or supporting employment schemes. But no-one has a magic wand to wave at that one".

The banking company considers the way forward to be to incorporate equal opportunities objectives into line management objectives. The media company in Manchester openly admits that "when resources are tight", during the period of restructuring, "people [i.e. line managers] look to their margins". And, most significantly in relation to disabled employees, the company "can only accommodate people with needs if it has *financial flexibility*" (emphasis added). The way that the media company understands the implication of this overall position is that, although flexible working practices potentially offer many disabled employees new and useful ways of organising their work, "there is bugger all fat in the system, [so working arrangements have to be] lean and for the minimum period". He concluded that disabled employees do present managerial problems and that the whole situation was an "unknown and worrying area". On the 'skills' side, the increased demands on employees, as set out by the banking company above, mean that the concept of what the 'employee' is has changed. An employee is now expected to be capable of every task and to be willing and able to work at all times, but at the same time this rarely happens. It can be argued that flexible working is often more of a way that employment practice is understood and constructed, rather than how it operates on a day-to-day basis in a company. For those employees, for reasons of

impairment or otherwise, who are not able to “do every job”, there is a series of issues about what these employees become in the company. The phrase used by the banking company is useful here - “the bank bends over backwards to help [disabled] staff”. What this shows is that the company feels it has to make an effort to fit this person into their flexible working arrangements. And part of the reason for this effort is the concern of the company to honour its equal opportunities policy. Again, the particular understanding of disability as a ‘problem’, of disabled people as being immobile is particularly evident in the above quote, i.e. the disabled people ‘can’t bend’ so the company has to adapt. There should, of course, be company provision to enable mobility impaired disabled people to work, but for many disabled people such thinking does not have relevance.

The second significant change in the companies has been the significant reductions in their staffing levels in the last five years, a practice known as ‘downsizing’.⁴⁸ The significance of these substantial cuts in employee numbers is that such reductions have become the norm in the three companies, with ‘efficiency’ the central focus of the companies’ employment strategy. This has meant a change in the relation between employees and employer. Now that the companies have taken drastic action, the remaining staff know that it could happen again; there is a sense of uncertainty pervading all of the companies, as *change* becomes an ongoing process (see Handy, 1994). It is these notions of ‘change’ and ‘process’ that need to be emphasised here. The continual rethinking of what the companies should do and so the continual reinterpretation of what ‘employment’ means, has a significant effect on the practices of employment. Employment potentially becomes a much more fluid set of practices, while at the same time operating within a powerful set of management and cultural forces.

Because of ‘downsizing’, recruitment has been limited in the three companies. The banking company (London) saw it as follows,

⁴⁸ The term ‘downsizing’ was coined by Stephen Roach, chief economist at Morgan Stanley, Wall Street, in the late 1980s. He recently stated that downsizing could damage a company, “If you compete by building, you have a future. If you compete by cutting, you don’t. ... Now the pendulum will swing from capital back to labour”. Companies will have to hire more workers and treat them better (The Independent, 1996).

“[Recruitment] has been a difficult area in the past couple of years because, like many companies, we have been shedding people not employing them, so there hasn’t been a great deal of work around recruitment”.

The communications company has similarly had limited recruitment and instead has been “concentrating more on the staff we’ve already got”. Both companies have sustained a low level of exclusively graduate recruitment through this period and in late 1996 and early 1997 are beginning to actively recruit again. However, for the communications company, this recruitment drive is in certain areas of the company, particularly in tele-marketing and in certain geographical areas. Employment, then, is becoming more tightly focused as a result of downsizing - particular skills, particular qualifications and particular areas. There appears to be a significant reconfiguration of what the companies understand by employment.

For the companies’ equal opportunities policies and disabled employees, staff reductions are a major issue - which employees leave the company and why? What position does this leave the remaining employees in? When recruitment restarts who will be targeted and what will be the potential damage to the company’s public image? The banking company’s representative in Manchester said that, “where possible, staff are lost via natural wastage”. However, as the communications company noted, there is increased pressure on certain members of the workforce, including disabled people:

“There is certainly a conflict between reducing numbers and the expectations of higher productivity and the expectation that they will keep on having disabled people in the team”.

The banking company argues that there is no clear evidence to show that disabled people have been leaving the company in disproportionately higher numbers, but concedes that,

“the other way [as opposed to disability] of leaving the company is ‘ill health retirement’ and those numbers have gone up hugely. It could be that more people who are disabled are going”.

And because of the culture of continual change and staff reductions in the company they are “very conscious that more disabled [people] will go”. With limited recruitment beginning once more, the equal opportunities team at the banking company are attempting to,

“influence those areas which are actually recruiting ... making sure that the line managers are aware of the things they ought to be doing”.

As was noted above, the banking company have a clear policy on disability and employment and the equal opportunities team are attempting to make it part of decision-making in the increasingly decentralised company structure, where "all decisions on recruitment and employment are made by line managers". The companies seem to be very sensitive to the issue of disability and employee reductions. They also seem to understand the disability and employment relation in a particular way, i.e. 'disability' as something that significantly reduces the productivity of an employee and makes a person unresponsive to change, and 'employment' as being adaptable to continual change. This reflects the underlying discursive formation around disability and employment discussed in the previous chapter. Importantly, though, this understanding has two sides, i.e. although the company's understanding of disability and employment is very narrow, it does exist and so affects the way that the company represents and employs disabled people. This 'materialisation' of a social construction was discussed in Chapter Four and is central to the overall argument of the research.

The third major change in working practices is the use of 'satellite' operations. The communications company and the banking company have both been involved in a significant shift in the patterns of employment, with their introduction and increased use of 'satellite offices', i.e. large buildings on out-of-town industrial estates where, in the case of banking, back-office information processing work is done and in the case of the communications company, telephone enquiries are directed and dealt with. Technology and flexible working practices have enabled this to happen, with the push coming from the companies to rationalise and make more efficient their operations (Financial Times, 1995). More than 250,000 people work in call centres in the UK⁴⁹, operated by retail, insurance, banking and communications companies, who now direct almost all of their enquiry telephone calls (known as 'customer care' or a 'customer support operations') to a call centre. So, rather than contacting their local bank branch or shop, a customer deals with an operator in an out-of-town centre. The centres reduce employee and overhead costs by circumventing a branch network operation. Call centres use a lot of part-time

⁴⁹ It is predicted that one million people will be working in call centres by 2000. It is the fastest growing employment sector in the UK economy (The Guardian, 1997h).

employees, and the work can be repetitive and stressful, as most people are 'phoning with problems. The work is certainly repetitive in the processing centres of the banking company, as the London representative said, "They work round the clock ... it's quite boring work really". The communications company has recently opened a large purpose-built site in Warrington, employing a high proportion of women on part-time and shift work; some contracts demand that employees work any 37 hours between 8am and 10pm, weekdays and weekends. The media company has a call centre (for enquiries and advice) in Glasgow, where staff do have a greater variety of tasks, but in most call centres the work is monotonous and the working conditions, according to the banking union Bifu, are often poor. Employees surveyed by recruitment consultants Austin Knight complained of a 'regime of fear and uncertainty' within call centres (The Guardian, 1997h).

The growth in call centres and processing centres has involved the beginning of recruitment once more in the three companies and the geographical shift of employment and skills within the companies. The satellite offices create particular issues for equal opportunities, as they use large numbers of female employees on part-time contracts, working over 24 hour periods. Disabled employees too are being employed in these centres, as the communications company commented,

"we do employ a fair number of disabled people there, [because] there's a lot of desk-based work, information technology and the building is accessible".

It is clearly an area the companies understand as having the potential to employ a significant number of disabled people. This view is based on a particular understanding of disability, that is, a disabled person as mobility impaired and having skills in information technology. It is important to question this, both to understand more fully the relationship between disability and employment and to 'open up' the meaning of disability. On the first point, the companies have a narrow understanding of what disabled people can do in employment: they see the work as having to be fixed, bounded and routine. I would like to argue that not only is employment practice never that easily pinned down, but also that the relationship between disabled people and employment is hugely varied and complex involving as many different skills, times, and spaces as for able-bodied people. On the second point, disability encompasses a wide range of bodily states, so to focus so precisely on physical mobility impairment reveals that the company

sees disability very narrowly and within the 'individual medical model' of disability. These two issues operate together to produce quite precise understandings and, more importantly, practices of the disability-employment relation in the companies.

The narrow understanding of disability and the capabilities and needs of disabled people in relation to employment, sits rather uneasily with the 'mainstreaming' notion of equal opportunities that the companies are attempting to introduce. A central part of this has been the monitoring schemes which all three companies have introduced to assess the number of disabled people they employ. This has usually involved an extra question on the annual employee audit questionnaire and, importantly, the companies have left the definition of disability 'open'. The respondent is asked a question such as, 'do you consider yourself to be disabled?' and is asked to answer 'Yes' or 'No', but not to provide any details of the impairment. This is highly significant, because it seems to contradict the whole recent history of 'pinning down' a person's disability by its medical criteria and restrictions on the person, a tradition most recently reproduced in the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995. The outcome of these surveys has surprised the companies. The communications company (in London) explained the reason for including the question,

"We have something like 1,000 registered disabled people, but we also knew we had a lot more as lots of people don't register. ... We had a 70 percent return rate and nearly 4,000 [questionnaires] back, saying 'Yes, I have a disability' ... The implications of that is that only 20 percent of the disabled people were registered".⁵⁰

The media company was "amazed" at its monitoring results,

"Overnight, as a result of the survey, the number of people who actually recorded a disability shot upto 6.9 percent [from 0.6 percent]. It was just hugely dramatic. For anything to go up 6 percent is quite phenomenal I think".

By using this approach the companies are widening the boundaries of 'disability' to include a whole new range of impairments. The banking company, for instance, was sure that not all of its now 4.5 per cent of disabled employees would fit the Government's tighter definition, But "as far as I'm concerned they are disabled". The companies are

⁵⁰ The registration scheme was abolished with the introduction of the DDA (see Chapter One).

opening up a definitional can of worms here, something which the banking company recognised,

“It’s extraordinary the way people answer because some people who I would *definitely* say were disabled wouldn’t declare themselves as such, and others who I thought ‘well, I wouldn’t have counted that’, have declared themselves” (original emphasis).

And the media company’s rise of 6 percent in proportion of disabled employees was explained by the company as the recording of “the sorts of conditions that certainly a person would not previously have thought of putting down”.

The companies had a form of disability monitoring system in place before the Disability Discrimination Act came into force, but the presence of Government legislation has forced them to adopt more sophisticated methods. Interestingly, it is the desire to avoid prosecution that has encouraged the companies to define ‘disability’ quite broadly - in the event of an industrial tribunal a company will find it easier to defend their position if they show themselves to be ‘hyper-sensitive’ to the disabled people amongst their staff. The communications company explains this as follows,

“if we are going to be able to offer people ‘reasonable adjustments’ [to the workplace, required by the DDA] then we have to find out who they are”.

However, as with any piece of legislation, there are ‘moments’ when the issues need to be pinned down. In the case of the DDA this is if a company is challenged in an industrial tribunal over a dismissal or refusal of promotion involving the disability of an employee. So, although the companies have a broad view of disability, when the issue comes to a head, they use medical advice, through their occupational health workers. The media company has a sort of ‘hierarchy’ of disabled employees,

“If you’ve got a ‘green card’ [i.e. are registered disabled] you are definitely ‘in’, you definitely count as disabled, otherwise if you declare yourself as disabled but don’t want to register we have an informal register, so it doesn’t go on your personnel record but at least the equal opportunities people know. And then, after that, if someone said ‘I have a disability’ and it was disputed, there would be an occupational health report”.

The companies appear to operate two systems of disability definition, one internal which is loose and broad, and one external which is tighter. This seems to work for the companies most of the time, but it becomes an issue if there is a conflict between the two, if a person classified internally as disabled is not defined in the same way by the

industrial tribunal. This remains an unknown area as the Act is in its first months of operation.

However, there are current problematic issues for the companies. Despite reassurances many 'disabled' employees are not answering 'Yes' on the monitoring form. The companies know this is happening and even though they are frustrated that they are not complete in their monitoring and cannot offer help to people who do not declare themselves, they understand the reasons for it. The communications company,

"knows a lot of people who don't declare because companies are downsizing and they are frightened that they'll be made redundant. That's perfectly understandable and they have right not to declare, but it doesn't help if we are trying to make life better for them".

And in the banking company there is a frustration that some people are suspicious of the monitoring, "Very few people ask for help. I was quite surprised really, because that was the 'carrot' for answering the questionnaire". So, despite all the reassurances and the new 'open' attitude to disability, there remains a deeply-held concern amongst many of the disabled employees that when the economic going gets tough, they will be the first to suffer and so the defence of anonymity is used. These concerns are well founded: the communications company admitted that there was evidence that during the period of 'downsizing' a higher proportion of disabled employees left the company and "there is a suspicion that in some cases they were being targeted".

There is an interesting situation within the companies around the issue of disability and employment. There is perhaps a dual notion of the relationship, with on the one hand both flexibility and disability (in the way that the companies talk and represent) being regarded as open and loose concepts, while on the other hand, in the realms of practice, both are fixed, admittedly loosely (but still fixed), within an overall and stronger set of understandings, assumptions and practices. So, it is best to think of both disability and employment, and the relationship between them, as contradictory and undergoing continual negotiation. The consequences for people with impairments and needs in employment as these meanings and effects are worked out is the subject of the next two sections, as the spatial working of the disability-employment relation is considered.

8.3 Spaces of employment and disability I: The workplace

The chapter has so far argued that the significant changes taking place within the companies - restructuring, flexible employment, downsizing and satellite operations - have presented significant challenges to the way that employment and disability and the relation between them, are understood and responded to. It has also been argued that although the companies represent employment and disability as coherent 'wholes', fixed with boundaries, these concepts are altogether looser, contested and dynamic. An embodied approach to the employment-disability relation allows this uncertainty to emerge and to be discussed.

This first of two sections on the employment-disability relation looks at the spaces of the workplace in the three companies. The 'workplace' means the places of work, 'on the ground' in Manchester and in the headquarters in London. It is the spatiality of the 'playing out' of the employment-disability relation in these workplaces that is the task of this section. The following section will look at the connections between these two workplaces and the way that the power relations of the companies work across space to produce and reproduce the understanding and representation of the employment-disability relation.

8.3.1 The understanding of disability and employment in the companies

Chapter Seven argued that the disability and employment organisations in the research had an underlying 'understanding' of the disability-employment relation. This discursive formation is that there is a fundamental impossibility of a relationship between disability and employment. Importantly, a discursive formation can be expressed in many different ways, so the understanding doesn't have to be exactly the same, but it is within the same overall conceptual framework. So, there can be quite different, and even contradictory, ideas and representations of, in this case, the employment-disability relation, but the discussion of these differences will be underpinned by an understanding of the relation, in this case as an impossibility. Chapter Seven also proposed that the notion of the discursive formation could be developed using an 'embodied' approach. Such an approach, it was argued, allows the formation to be considered in a more 'open'

way, i.e. in this case the two central concepts in the relation, employment and disability are rethought as highly and continuously contested and so the relation between them as changeable. However, crucially for the embodied approach, it is not argued that the two concepts do not exist; they do, but they are always in a state of becoming. The embodied approach 'grounds' the discussion of disability and employment, as it emphasises how the social constructions of the relation (including the discursive formation) become material in the bodies and experiences of disabled employees.

The operation of this discursive formation, from an embodied perspective, can be seen in the equal opportunities policies of the companies. Although the companies have 'equal opportunity units' within their human resources departments, all three are attempting to integrate their equal opportunities agenda and initiatives into the 'mainstream' line manager decision-making on personnel issues. The banking company, at national level, said,

"Ideally there would be no EO [Equal Opportunities] department, because line managers would be handling the issues as a matter of day-to-day management. However, at present there is an equal opportunities department and it is unlikely to disappear".

There is a simultaneous understanding of disability (and other equality issues) as a separate issue that requires a dedicated department and as an additional issue for the personnel department. This simultaneity is reinforced by the recruitment policies of the companies, which attempt to treat all potential employees the same, but still try and boost the recruitment of disabled people. For example, the equal opportunities unit of the banking company said,

"Recruitment is beginning to pick up and so again we need to influence those areas which are actually recruiting ... so making sure that line managers are aware of the things *they ought to be doing*" (emphasis added).

So, there is the discursive formation of the impossibility of the employment-disability relation in action, as the companies appear to separate their recruitment decision-making into what they do as a matter of course, and what they 'should' be doing. However, they are doing this in the context of attempting to integrate or 'mainstream' disability into personnel policies, through the monitoring programmes discussed in the previous section and the shifting of decision-making to line-managers. The companies recognise that disability is an issue that has to be dealt with effectively, through this dual approach. The

communications company have an equal opportunities 'champion' on their board of directors, who is supported by a 'gender' champion, a 'race champion' and a 'disability champion'. These people, usually senior executives, 'champion' (i.e. actively support) the cause of disability (and the other issues) within the company,

"[Their] role is to get equal opps. into the line, to be behind the person who is the figurehead, and help get policy through the divisions [of the company] ... The champions are there to get senior support and the [EO] policy unit do the day-to-day stuff. It's attacking it from both ends".

This dual sense of disability as about everyday practicalities *and* about integration or mainstreaming into everyday employment can be understood as a development of the discursive formation. The move towards 'mainstreaming' and 'diversity' in equal opportunities strategies could be seen as a challenge to the formation, while the everyday assistance to disabled employees could be understood as the discursive formation still firmly in place. However, if we take an embodied approach to the formation, we can see that it simultaneously remains in place and is altogether more fluid. Chapter Four argued that the embodiedness requires a process of materialisation and a resulting 'impermanent fixity', as the bodies of employees are affected by and, in turn, effect the processes of employment. The discursive formation is still important and effective, but it is constantly being reproduced and reshaped as disability and employment are reworked and re-understood. Inside the companies, then, there is a continual debate and negotiation of the nature and dynamic of the employment-disability relation that has very real bodily effects for disabled people and their experience and position in work. The next two sub-sections will explore how these experiences are 'worked out' in the everyday practices and processes of employment, using the embodied experiences of disabled employees in the companies.

8.3.2 *Workplace organisation and structures*

It has already been shown that both the banking and communications companies have split their corporate operations between 'shop' units and satellite offices. This has been done for reasons of saving costs, efficiency, competitiveness (in two very competitive markets) and to reflect the new ways of operating. The other important issue here is that it has been enabled by developments in communications and computing

technology. The banking company has reduced its number of branches and converted the ones that remain into, primarily, places for the sale of the bank's products (i.e. bank accounts, mortgages, loans), while retaining the traditional facilities for cash withdrawal and deposit (see discussion of Figure 1). The processing of cheques, statements, and customer letters that used to take place in the 'back room' have all been transferred to a few large 'processing centres', usually located on industrial estates on the fringes of towns and cities. There is another function for the bank's out-of-town centres: the banking company (like its competitors) is encouraging its customers to do more of their banking procedures (paying bills, checking balances etc.) on the telephone, rather than at a branch. There is one national number for these enquiries and all calls are routed to the nearest centre. The communications company has gone down a similar route. It never really had branches like the banking company, just shops selling its products and as a place for enquiries and payment. The nature of its business, however, has meant that the company has developed the telephone as the main means of enquiry. As with the bank, all calls are made to a series of national numbers, then are routed to the appropriate section in one of their 'call centres'.

Space is being used by these two companies to clearly divide their operations. The branches and shops are on the high-street, the processing and call centres outside the city; the first very visible, the latter virtually invisible. The companies are presenting their public image in the branches and shops, while the routine processing work goes on behind closed doors. The 'back room' - the term used by banks to describe where the processing took place in branches - has now become a very large room and geographically separate. There is a second use (and reconfiguration) of space within the branches of the banking company and within the processing and call centres. The branch in Manchester is described by its manager as having three parts: 'the counter', 'out front', and 'out the back'. This is reflected in the advertisement discussed earlier in 8.2.1 (and Figure 1) and is clearly a standard way that the bank is reorganising its branch space. But, as will be seen below, the boundaries of these three spaces are being blurred as employee work designation is being ended. In the processing and call centres, space is used in another way. There are large, open rooms, with upto one hundred operators seated at

desks with a telephone and computer screen to deal with enquiries. The processing centres are open long hours (some for 24 hours), with people working on a shift system. Here there is only really one type of space, with all of the 'work stations' identical.

The companies, as discussed in 8.2.3, have significantly changed their patterns of employment practice and the changes have had a significant impact on the employment opportunities for the disabled employees. The reduction in staff numbers has put many disabled employees, who cannot work as 'effectively' as their colleagues, in a difficult position, and the banking company readily concedes that this 'pressure' has seen the number of people retiring through 'ill health' (which in many cases can be equated with disability) increase. 'Flexible' working patterns, in all their diversity, have, again, put pressure on many disabled employees, who perhaps cannot fulfil the increased demands of the employment. The satellite offices have provided new opportunities for some disabled employees, but the work has been of a particular kind. It is important to state here that the changes in employment organisation described above affect disabled people in a huge variety of ways. The broad range of bodily states and needs that people with impairments have, inevitably means that changes in employment have a whole series of consequences. So, although it is probably true to claim that restructuring has put more pressure on disabled employees the actual effect will be different for each person with an impairment. And, flexible employment practices can offer advantages as well as disadvantages to disabled people, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

We can use three examples of disabled employees from the communications company to illustrate the range of experiences. Brian⁵¹, who has been with the company for over 20 years, has experienced, in the last 5 years, increasing hearing impairment. He was forced, for safety reasons, to give up his job as an engineer and was transferred to the control centre organising the engineering jobs. As a result the skills required changed, from 'hands on' engineering abilities to computer and telephone skills. As his body changed so did his experience of work and the way he was understood by the company. Importantly, these changes were not, initially, all negative, as Brian gained a position of power in the control centre. However, as Brian explains, "Because of the worsening

⁵¹ All names have been changed.

hearing loss I've had to come off the control". He is now doing a 'routine' clerical job, "at the same desk all day, typing away". He is unhappy with what has happened as his body and work have changed together,

"Things are changing all the time and it's hard to differentiate between these changes and my hearing loss. ... I used to be the head of the team, people were learning, I was teaching. I was on the power side. People were relying on me. That's now gone. I'm like in a cupboard on the side. I can't keep up anymore with what's going on. The communication isn't there".

By contrast, John has had a severe visual impairment since birth, and his work has always been clearly defined in the company. In the 17 years he has been with the company he has been a typist, doing work in the legal and medical areas,

"I am limited to certain parts of the business because I can't handle drawings and copy-typing, so I take audio work".

He is about to experience a major change, however, as the company shifts completely to the 'Windows' computer package, "this will be the biggest change to hit me in 12 years", and this is part of a larger set of changes as, "human interaction is being replaced by machine interaction". The third employee, Stephen, has had quite a different experience. He is a line manager who has been with the company for 4 years. His job involves organisational and communication skills, with a lot of interpersonal contact and moving around the region. This movement is partially restricted because Stephen's epilepsy means that he cannot drive. However, he says that his impairment has not affected his ability to do his job, even as the demands of work have increased over the last couple of years. Interestingly, Stephen does not consider himself to be a disabled person,

"Since I've been on the tablets it's not affected me in any way. Not had blackouts or anything. So, because it's not affected me and I've not had to make any changes to my job, I don't think it does classify as a disability for *me*. If it does interfere with work then I have to make it clear [to the employer]" (emphasis added).

For all three employees there is a clear connection between the mind and physical body and their work. For Brian, his worsening hearing impairment and the increased flexibilisation of employment have forced him into a lower skilled occupation. Crucially, the bodily changes have interacted with the employment changes to produce this position and experience. John's body is more 'stable' and his work has remained stable too, albeit at a low level of occupation. His visual impairment restricts his job capabilities, but the work has been arranged to suit this. He seems to be able to maintain his position in the

company. Stephen is again different as his invisible impairment has not affected his ability to do his job, or the skills and times he works, but it still has an affect on his mobility and he has to find ways round this.

A bodily focus allows us to grasp what is happening in the disability-employment relation. The above examples show that there is a close interrelation between the bodies of employees and their employment. Importantly, however, the experiences and affects of these interactions are varied and depend on a whole series of factors, including the bodily changes in the employee, the type of work they are involved in and their occupational position. There is no overall experience in flexible employment for disabled people. An embodied approach highlights this, while at the same time stressing the importance of the power relations in employment which are the framework for these experiences.

A crucial factor here is how the companies themselves understand and represent the employment-disability relation. There is a sense in the companies that they understand disability quite narrowly, making the connection between it and flexible working, in the context of the discursive formation. So, flexible working can only be done by 'flexible' people, flexible in a bodily and metaphorical sense. The companies also understand and materialise this relation in spatial terms. They see work as being reorganised in a split between branch or shop and satellite offices, between different jobs and so, inevitably, different types of employees. The shops and branches are seen as the 'front line' of the companies where the employees have to be very flexible, adaptable, 'agile' and 'mobile'. One bank employee commented,

"I do feel that you're expected to become more of a sales person than the old fashioned bank clerk ... I went on a course which taught that sales will come through good service ... It's been difficult to change to become a sales person because when I joined the bank that wasn't [expected]".

In the satellite offices and back rooms, 'behind the lines', the workers are understood as less flexible, more routine-based, and so less mobile, and agile. As another employee put it,

"The routine stuff - opening of accounts, setting up standing orders - you farm it all out to a district service centre. ... [They] are under the same pressures as you are, albeit without seeing the customers".

This is a particular understanding of flexibility, based on its metaphorical sense as the way that all employees 'should be' (see Chapter Five) and disability as lack of agility and

limited in skill. And it is the way that companies represent and operate policies around the disability-employment relation. It is part of the task of this research to challenge and open up these understandings. Chapter Five argued that there are many types of working which come under the 'flexibility' heading, but most are not 'flexible' in the sense of how flexibility is often talked about, as concerned with 'agility' and 'adaptability'. They are, in fact, quite rigid in their structure, spatially and functionally, and demand a limited range of skills, where the flexibility is for the employer who offers only limited term contracts.

So, as we have seen above, 'flexibility' is an ideal concept that gets played out as a whole range of contradictory and messy employment situations and experiences for disabled people and, if there is an overriding theme, then it is one of insecurity rather than flexibility. 'Disability' too, as Chapter Three argued, is a broad range of experiences and situations, that tends to be understood as physical incapability, based in the body of an individual. So, how are we then to understand the position of disabled people in the spaces of employment? Perhaps the best way is to consider that there is a whole series of relations, rather than one overall relation, between disability and employment, relations that are focused in the body of a person. We cannot easily say, then, that 'disabled people' will be suited for a particular kind of job - such as working in a satellite office - or that certain jobs will be of an inappropriate type for disabled people. It is the interaction between disabled people and their employment which should be the focus of academic interest, not the overall employment-disability relation. It is the 'mobility' aspect of disability that the companies tend to focus on, making a strong connection between the flexibility of the job and the (in)flexibility of the person. In Manchester, the media company used the example of a radio producer, who is seen as a good 'fixer' (i.e. setting up interviews and so on), but "cannot do the full range of work [because] when a story breaks he can't dive into the radio car and go there". The media company as a result, though "accommodating him", saw his employment as unusual, "We can cope with one on the station, but two? It does present managerial problems". Space, then, does matter in the companies with the working out of these embodied negotiations taking place

in the spaces of employment; management intentions and policies are interpreted and translated in the context of the local workspace.

Inside the workspaces of the divided structure of the companies, other processes operate. The banking company's branches are split into a number of functional spaces. In Manchester, "there are three parts of the bank: the counter, the advisers upfront, and a few people out the back doing bits and pieces". The employees are expected to move - literally and in terms of skill use - between these three spaces, as dictated by the demands of the customers. As one employee explained,

"[My work very much depends] on what customers want. If we are packed out there or somebody wants to open an account and no-one's available, the I'll leave my work here".

So, the clearly defined boundaries of the bank have been blurred to allow employees to move between the different functions, to provide an improved service for the customers. This is now the expectation of the bank's employees, to be multi-skilled and to be able to respond to the demands of customers and the business. An employee commented,

"You can't get away with *doing one thing*. You've got to be prepared to help people out, for the benefit of us [all] really".

And another employee commented on the spatial aspect of their work,

"I try to [go round the office] an awful lot really because my normal position is up on the mezzanine floor and there's only two others sitting in that area, and I can become really embroiled in what I'm doing without exerting my influence on the people I'm supposed to be motivating ... So I try [to move around] but with us being on three floors it's quite difficult".

The communications company, in its high street shops, also has different areas of product selling and these are clear to the customer. But the staff 'move' between these spaces, between the counter and the product selling area. The media company's spaces - the administration and broadcasting areas and the spaces of production, i.e. in the studio, and out on location for news, sport, drama and features - are, as has been said above, less easily defined. The staff in the administration block in Manchester are in well-defined employment areas, but the spaces of media production are much more open and flexible, requiring literal and skill movement between and within, for example with the possibility of 20 hour days in several locations. Inside the processing centres and call centres of the banking and communications companies, the workspaces are more tightly defined, as noted above, and the job roles and expectations are similarly tightly defined. The

administration centre of the media company seems to have the same function, with spaces and roles more defined. There are two related issues of importance here. Firstly, that the companies are spatially restructuring their workplaces and workforces, involving a simultaneous definition and blurring of their workspaces and the expectations of their employees to both 'know their place' and 'move' to respond to customer demand. Secondly, that the construction of employee 'ability' seems to be based heavily around 'movement', which reflects a particular understanding of the relationship between employment and (dis)ability; namely, one that focuses on movement and physical mobility disability and does not include the whole range of physical and mental impairments that employees and people, more generally experience (many of which, of course, have no effect on movement between space or tasks). The two issues together are possibly reinforcing the disadvantaged and pressured position and experience of many disabled people in the workplace. The use and remaking of space within the companies has an impact on the representation, understanding and experience of disabled people in the companies. Brian, the hearing-impaired employee in the communications company, illustrates this, as the moves to flexible working and the technological push for 'efficiency' has pushed him from a position of 'power' in the 'control centre' to working in "a cupboard on the side". His employment experience changed as the understanding of his abilities were 'played out' in the changing spaces of employment.

8.3.3 *Workplace practices*

Secondly, the changing skills of staff in the workplaces of the three companies. Chapter Five argued that changes in the understanding and structure of time-space and skill in the workplace and workforce were a central part of flexible employment. We have seen above how time and space are being restructured within the companies. Skills too are undergoing significant change: the previous chapter spoke of 'multi-skilling', concluding that it was more likely to be 'multi-tasking' that was being required of workers, i.e. the expectation that they would perform a whole range of tasks with not necessarily different skills involved. The media company has had a recent 'experiment', as they called it, with a camera and sound in one unit, and operated by a single person,

rather than a separate camera operator and sound engineer. The company saw this as quite a significant change, "this is [an employee] completely stepping outside normal practice". An attempt to reduce operating costs was being combined with a refiguration of a job and a skill. The challenging of a once strict job demarcation was the result of this 'experiment'.

The banking company, as shown in the advertisement in 8.2.1, is changing its approach to banking and as a consequence to employee roles. The staff who work in the processing centres will be involved in routine clerical tasks, while the staff in the branches will be engaged in customer-related tasks; the staff at the branches have a "sales role", according to the London representative, and those in the processing centres,

"work round-the-clock on shifts ... using high-tech equipment which has replaced a lot of the manual stuff which used to go on".

The representative also commented, about the processing centres,

"It's quite boring work actually. There is a higher turnover [of staff] than the bank would like, but people just get bored out of their minds".

At the Manchester branch, when asked during the restructuring where they would like to work the employees chose where they wanted to be,

"some people are happy doing processing work all day and would not want to serve customers, and vice versa. Most people have got what they want".

Staff within the bank branch are expected to do a whole series of tasks - which could be called multi-skilling - and, most importantly for the bank, to decide in what way and when to use these skills. This 'self-management' of skill and time-space is what the banking company, and the other companies too, expect of their employees. For the companies this is what true 'flexibility' is to them. So, the employee in the branch must be aware of the needs of the customer at all times and must decide what to do. The representative in Manchester stressed that this is how they decide what to do,

"The emphasis is on customer service. ... The important thing is that if we get a queue at the counter we must get more people on the counter or we must get someone to encourage people to use the self-service machines. Similarly if no-one's at the counter I would expect some of the cashiers to go round the back and ask for something to do. If lending had a lot on, I would expect someone to be flexible enough to go from the ground floor to the first floor to help out. The object is, although somebody maybe a 'cashier' or an 'adviser', if there is a bottleneck in the bank they've got to be flexible enough to know 'think customer, must do something'. That's what we're trying to get people to do".

So, job demarcations largely go in the branches of the bank, with all staff being expected to carry out most or all tasks. The banking company see this as how it should be,

"In the ideal world [everyone would be able to do everything]. We're not close to that yet. We have some people who can do every job. What we need is a lot more of those sort of people."

And when they recruit an employee this willingness and ability to do a number of tasks is crucial, they don't want staff who, "don't want to change a job they know well", but rather "we look at adaptability and initiative". The key word here is 'adaptability', which means not only an ability to do a variety of tasks now, but an ability to take on whatever new tasks the bank's branch requires in the future, which is not always predictable.

Information technology is used extensively by all three companies, but perhaps particularly by the communications company. Both with their high street 'shops' and in their administrative and call centres, many processes are being switched to electronic formats, for example customer accounts and sales records in the shops, e-mail internal communication within the administrative centres and 'phone call queuing and answering in the call centres. As such the skill 'profile' of the company has changed, from a more manual and engineering emphasis, to information technology. This clearly changes the employment practices of the company's employees, which for some will become more open and, for others, particularly those with out-of-date skills or more limited capability in this area, a restriction on opportunity. The real area of expansion in employment in the communications company (after massive staff reductions) is at the call centres, as described above, as the Manchester representative said, "There is a massive employment drive in telemarketing [at a call centre]". The company is also keen to encourage its managers to spend less time in the office and communicate with their colleagues electronically, "A lot of the time it's for managers who find coming into the office is counterproductive", so they are provided with modems and computers at home and/or in the car. Again, the whole nature of what employment means in this company is shifting, and the employees are being expected to adapt. The essence of what a job skill *is* is changing, from a broad range of roles, to a more specifically information technology related role, whether as a manager or a 'phone operator in a call centre.

There seem to be a number of processes occurring within the companies in terms of workplace employment practices: firstly, a breaking down of boundaries between jobs

and skills in some parts of the companies, but in others a reinforcing of roles and skills; secondly, an expectation of multi-tasking and a more overall requirement for adaptability - so that 'flexibility' goes beyond specific times and skills and is more about how adaptable a person is to the culture of constant change within the company and about managing themselves, their time and their skills; thirdly, the shift in skills in all of the companies to information technology. The three key processes have changed what an employee 'means' in the three companies. Du Gay (1997a) argues that the meaning of work and the meaning of an employee is a changing phenomenon, contingent upon the cultural and economic conditions of that moment. These changes in the workplace practices of the companies are a challenge to the dominant meaning of the worker, as fixed time-space, fixed skill (full-time and single tasked) and directed by management. Now the worker is differently constructed, as of 'loose' time-space and 'loose' skill, and self-managed.

We can use the concepts of the 'embodied approach' - process, materialisation, and the body - to think through these changes. The new forms, structures and spaces of employment are forcing one to think about employment in terms of *process*, i.e. as an ongoing set of relations that are never resolved, always being (re)negotiated. This does not, however, mean that employment is without parameters or certainties. One of the concerns with du Gay's analysis is that it encourages one to think that employment is limitlessly 'loose' and 'open', when in fact there are strong power relations operating in the organisation and the representation of work. The very process of employment restructuring in the three companies is in fact a series of certainties, but these certainties are based on change and process rather than fixity. Change and the associated insecurity become the new certainty. Additionally, there are moments of fixity in the constant change in employment, when changes become certain even for a short period, such as the expectation of multi-skilling or the use of job sharing arrangements. It is these moments of fixity or *materialisation* that the embodied approach recognises and emphasises. It is essential to recognise this process in order to understand what is happening to disabled people in the companies. There is a series of processes operating within the companies, in the restructuring of employment and, at the same time, the (re)understanding of what

disability and disabled employees mean. It is the times and spaces of the materialisation of these two sets of processes that is central to the debate - it is the degree of 'fit' (as discussed in Chapter Seven) between the meaning and materialisation of 'disability' and 'employment' that is the key. If, at the moments of certainty of these two phenomena, there is an understanding relationship then disabled people's experience of employment will be good and positive. If not, then discrimination and disadvantage will be experienced. What is crucial here for the overall debate is that the position of disabled people in employment is not fixed, either as one of disadvantage or benefit. The embodied approach allows us to think of the connection between disabled people and employment as one of 'impermanent fixity' (as discussed in Chapter Four), a relation that is continually changing with moments of fixity, within the framework of power relations.

A good example of the embodied nature of employment is the experience of Jane, until recently an employee in the banking company. Jane was employed by the banking company for several years, on the switchboard. She is severely visually impaired, but this caused her no problems in her job. In 1996 the company centralised all its telephone services to two regional sites, which were too far away for Jane to travel to. As a result she became a cashier in the branch, with special magnifiers to enlarge the computer screens. But, as the branch manager put it,

"To cut a long story short we persevered and she was very grateful for all we'd done, but it got to the point where she was stressed because she couldn't do what everybody else was having to do. It was agreed that she's leaving with a package. I feel disappointed because she's a lovely girl, [but] Jane was 50 per cent efficient, and on reception you need someone who can read the screens".

A conventional, non-embodied, reading of Jane's experience would probably have concluded that either her weaker position and her experience were due to her own inability to do the job and adapt to the changing employment conditions or were due to the failure of the company to make the workplace accessible for her (these are, respectively, the first and second 'theoretical understandings' of the disability-employment relation, set out in 1.4). But Jane's (brief) story shows that neither of these understandings really captures her experience. Jane had a job that she could do and was happy with, on the switchboard. The change in the company's policy of telephone systems, to two call centres, could be seen as indirect discrimination as the company did

not make allowances for the travel that Jane would have to do. But the distances were such that most employees would not have wanted to travel. And you could argue that people with visual impairments *know* that they cannot travel long distances or *don't want to*, because of the difficulties they face, however good the transport system. So, Jane took up her job in the branch as a cashier and the company provided access by enlarging the screens for her. But she began to find reading the screens difficult and this affected her work, something she was well aware of and unhappy with. Now, the company was attempting to enable her to work and she was capable of her work. But her bodily involvement in the work - the use of her eyes, the interaction with the customers - was not how she wanted it to be. As the manager stated she was stressed because she couldn't do what everyone else was having to do. So, Jane left the employment of the bank. This could be seen as a 'failure', in that she has, on the one hand been denied the opportunity to work and on the other hand been a victim of discrimination. But, we could also understand Jane's experience as a realistic response to employment and her impairment. Jane took the decision that she did not want to stay within the company for the sake of it and do an alternative job that did not use her skills, and so she decided to leave, because she couldn't do the job she wanted to do, despite her own perseverance and the efforts of the branch manager. This may seem like a admission of defeat by the company's in its drive for equal opportunities and efficiency, but it is in fact a recognition of the reality of employment and life.

So there moments of 'fixity' for Jane, when the job and her abilities were aligned and the company's understanding of her fitted that of her own. As her own abilities changed and as the spatio-temporal organisation of the employment changed, so the elements no longer fitted together and problems arose, which were then (initially at least) realigned. There was a constant interaction between Jane and her employment, both her body and the job being changed in the process. Thinking of disability as 'embodied' allows us to look at the 'reality' of an employment experience, the difficulties, the

pleasures, the barriers and the ways through, much more effectively than if we think of it in the 'oppositional' framework.⁵²

One of the key power relations is around the meaning of work: if, as du Gay argues, the meaning of work is understood as contingent, then it is just as important what the new meaning of work is *not*. That is, the flexible, customer-interactive, self-managed employee which all the companies are promoting, is *not* the inflexible, poor communicator who needs to be managed. There is a strong sense of 'real' work and 'other' or 'unreal' work and the former relies on the latter to exist. It can be further argued that the discursive formation around disability and employment is reflected in these new employee management practices. The concept of 'real' work being dependent on what it is not can also be thought of as work done by able-bodied people, as *not* being the work done by disabled people. So, it is not just that there are seen to be 'issues' for disabled people wanting to do 'real' work, it is that they *cannot* do this work without disrupting the notion of what that work is. Having a disabled person in a new flexible, self-managed job is seen as unusual. All of the words associated with this type of employment - 'adaptable', 'flexible', 'agile', 'responsive', 'multi-skilled' - are the very words *not used* to describe disabled people, however inaccurately. The words used to describe disabled people - fixed, limited, unable, low-skilled - are the sort of words used to describe the 'old' type of work, work that companies have in limited amounts. The 'areas' referred to here are particular spaces and skill areas and, of course, connected to that, the existence of these areas is dependent on them not being the spaces where the real work takes place. However, the seemingly clear-cut division between 'real' and 'unreal' work and the association with 'ability' and 'disability', is part of the powerful discourse around disability and employment. The line between types of work is, of course, not so easily drawn and the line too between able and disabled people is not simple to define. An embodied approach allows us to deal with these issues effectively by recognising the

⁵² 'Jane' (not her real name) was not interviewed as she had left the company and wanted no further contact.

changes in employment and the understanding of employment while at the same time acknowledging the power of the representation of the employment-disability relation.

The companies' understanding that disability and new forms of employment do not 'work' together can be seen to a limited extent in the spatial organisation of employment. The companies employ disabled people (in the broadest sense) in all areas and spaces of employment, but there is an understanding within the companies that the relation between disability and workspace is much more straightforward. The division - as understood by the companies - is between 'real' and 'unreal' work *and* the 'public' and 'private' spaces of employment (respectively), with 'appropriate' work for disabled people being more in the private spaces of the backrooms where the work is less flexible and the spaces more uniform. The presence of disabled people in the front, public spaces of the companies challenges this understanding, while at the same time (in the embodied way of thinking) does not diminish its lasting importance. Spaces of work are used by the company to reinforce its understanding of disability. Jane's experience in the banking company illustrates this. She found that once she moved onto the counter as a cashier, in the 'public' space of the bank, she began to feel greater pressure from the company and from the work itself. She had to work extra hard both to do the job as expectations of productivity increased and, just as importantly, to make herself 'fit' into a space where disabled people are not normally employed. Eventually, the power of the discursive formation combined with her own changing body (under mental stress as well as visually impaired) resulted in the end of her employment.

8.4 Spaces of employment and disability II: National and local processes

This section will look at the spatial organisation of the company nationally and locally. That is, what are the processes and relations that occur across space, between the central and local and how does this interplay with the understanding of the employment-disability relation?

8.4.1 *The companies national and local*

The three companies in the study have headquarters in London and significant regional operations. All of the companies use their regional structure to deliver policy, products and services, with the premise that a network of 'local' sites is the most effective method. This is for two reasons: firstly, it would be logistically impossible for the company to produce and supply all its products and services from one central place - particularly London - and, secondly, there is a long-held recognition that a presence in the locale is vital to the success of the company; it is the way that the company can 'tune in' its operations to the needs and desires of its customers in different parts of the country. Despite the supposed 'evening out' of differences in the country and the increasingly uniform and national nature of products and services, the companies still clearly feel that there is a need to recognise the uniqueness of the locale (Massey, 1995).

Central to this debate is the internal restructuring that the companies have undergone - and are still going through - in the last five or so years. As described in 8.2.2, all three companies have restructured from a centrally controlled operation to a functionally stranded and decentralised schema. What this has meant in practical terms is that the different key functions of the company - for example in the communications company, 'Personal Communications' and 'National Business Communications' - now operate across the country and are dealt with in each local area, rather than being controlled at the centre and then only are the necessary elements passed down from the centre to the local areas. What it has meant in theoretical terms is that at the same moment the companies are decentralising and centralising. All three companies emphasise how they are creating 'local business units' within their operation, so that each local area has its own profit and loss account, which the manager has responsibility for and each can make decisions in other key areas, including recruitment.

The web of connections which link the companies' operations, national and local, together is highly complex. They are what allows the company to operate, but also they are important in how the company understands itself and how the company is perceived. They are important too in the debate over disability and employment, for the networks of

communication and power within the companies produce and reproduce the representation and understanding of the employment-disability relation.

The banking company in Manchester claims that it has control over its day-to-day running and its recruitment policy. But almost every day a circular arrives from national headquarters in London with policy advice and instructions,

“[The instructions] come in daily circulars, which say ‘promote this project’. It’s down to the managers to [implement them]”.

The manager in Manchester has to interpret these instructions in the context of the local site, but at the same time implement the policy. So, for example, on recruitment, the banking company nationally has a policy of efficiency and reduction in staff numbers and the local branch manager is expected to play their part in this reduction, while at the same time maintaining an effective service in the Manchester area. On a key area of recruitment - the annual staff monitoring survey - the local manager has no input, as this is done by central office; the local manager “hasn’t seen it, when they want feedback from the staff they send it to them direct”.

The communications company also has local decision-making on recruitment, but in the company’s largest growth area - employment in ‘call centres’ - there is more central control. The call centres are quite a distinct ‘shape’ of employment. They are planned and controlled from the centre, but locally-managed. However, their location is based on quite different reasons than, as was noted above, the shops and administration centres which want to be ‘locally responsive’ to their customers. The call centres could be located virtually anywhere, because of their reliance on telephone communication. But they are *not* located just anywhere. In fact, the communications company’s call centres, the banking company’s processing sites and the media company’s enquiry centre, are in very particular locations - for example, in Salford, Glasgow, Leeds, and Warrington, all areas of decline from the previous industrial period. They are *not* in London or the South-East. As Massey (1995) argues, the companies are using the spaces of employment to their advantage. These sites are in these places for reasons beyond rational economy, there is more going on than just jobs; to quote Massey, “Behind major shifts between dominant spatial divisions of labour within a country lie changes in the spatial

organisation of the relations of production, the development and reorganisation of what are called spatial structures of production” (p.7).

We can broaden this out to think about all the activities of the companies. The different parts of the companies - the shops, the branches, the call centres, the processing sites - are all located in places, but it is the relations between these places which is crucial. It is these relations which make-up what the company is, make the ‘space’ of the company. So, the banking company’s ‘elements’ - the London headquarters, the branches, including Manchester, and the processing sites, including Leeds - are held together by the material links of policy advice and product services, and the intangible links of ‘knowing’ where the control is held. These links *are* the company, without its spatiality it would be nothing, however much it attempts to present itself as a single, *homogeneous organisation*. Extending the argument, we can think about the relations inside the company and how, whenever there are relations across an uneven surface (that surface being the locations and functions of the company), there is an issue of power. Power (in this context) is usually thought of as a flow of instructions running out of a centre into a series of locales, who take on those instructions. We can perhaps think of power as relational, i.e. coming from many sources which together make the power of the structure; the centre has no power without the ‘consent’ and input of the locales. In the present case we can see that there is a complex web of power relations within the companies - the restructuring and decentralisation of the companies was an attempt to spread responsibility for decision-making and part of this was assigning power to local areas. So, there are more flows of power within the companies, all emanating from particular localities and sets of social relations.

Peck, in ‘Work-place’ (1996), argues for this spatialised notion of power in relation to labour markets. He contends that orthodox economic theory has viewed the labour market as a rational commodity market, wholly devoid of place base or spatiality. He puts forward a case for labour markets as socially constructed and place specific, nicely critiquing Piore and Sabel’s (1984) overall economic rationale theory of labour markets for its dependence on local case studies. With regard to the argument of this section, this adds weight to the contention that power is spread within the companies, or

to be more precise, the power of the local areas (and their labour markets) 'makes' the power of the central location.

On equal opportunities the same system operates: the local managers are responsible for the implementation of the company's policy. Now, particularly because of the Disability Discrimination Act, the companies are pushing their disability employment policy in all literature and 'down the line' to the local site. Because of the 'distance' - both physical and in terms of understanding - between central policy making unit and local site, the companies are becoming much 'stronger' on equal opportunities and disability issues. There are policies, such as 'Disability leave'⁵³ in the banking company, which the centre will instruct the local site to 'promote'. The banking company, as with all recruitment, decides on whether to employ a disabled person and whether an employee who becomes disabled can remain in the company. As was argued in 8.2.2, it is really the approach and attitude of the manager and the relationship between manager and disabled employee that is the key to the outcome of such a situation. The banking manager has to actually *implement* company policy, a far more complex task in the local than at the national level. The media company, partly because of the size of its local operation, has a major independent programme of equal opportunities work. The Manchester representative,

"In the north we're in the process of making an internal video for training purposes about the portrayal of disabled people [which] is one of *our own* priorities" (emphasis added).

The representative of the communications company in Manchester claimed that his team had "some input into the [EO] policy". He continued, "it's a case of consultation, because we're the ones who have to run the thing". The relationship between national and local is complex though, because at the same time, "we're here to make sure that the company's policies are upheld and introduced". The equal opportunities policy, including the disability policy, is a combination of national and local initiatives, with information and ideas flowing between the two. The company policies are increasingly strong in this area

⁵³ 'Disability leave' is a system by which a person who becomes disabled while in employment, or their impairment worsens, can have a few months (or whatever is appropriate) paid leave to rehabilitate.

of employment, but it is the local managers who actually have to make the policy work and this involves 'reading' the company's messages in the light of local realities.

8.4.2 *The power of the locale?*

The above discussion gave a qualified role to the locale in the decision-making and employment practice of the three companies. It argued that it was more the flow of connections between the centre and the locales that produced what the company *is*, not the locale in particular. Peck (1996) argues that labour markets, because they are socially constructed, are different in different places (and different times). He calls for a "restoration and overhaul of the concept of the local labour market", which has as its central focus that "local labour markets matter" (p.11). The companies in the research, however, had a more complex view of their involvement with the local labour market - to them *although the local labour market is important, it is only one labour market in the many that the companies use*. The media company's local representative stated that,

"We try to link into Manchester. But we are part of larger corporate. We recruit internationally and nationally".

The representative is saying here that while the local site of the company is located in Manchester, the recruitment web goes much wider and the recruitment process itself operates at a national (and international) level. Now, to be clear about this - this is just one part of the recruitment process. There are many local Manchester people employed by the media company, but they are more likely to be in administrative and clerical jobs, in the 'support' side of the organisation; it is the jobs in production, the public face of the company, that are more likely to be recruited beyond the locale. The media company also runs systems of internal job reallocation, so that people can transfer from London, Edinburgh or Bristol, to Manchester. Again this only happens in certain - production and managerial - areas of employment. The banking company, on the other hand, "recruits most people locally" in its branch and processing sites. The local manager saw this as a problem as the Manchester employees,

"have got an attitude problem in terms of change. Trying to change anything here is difficult. They say 'we do things differently in Manchester'. There isn't that reluctance to change in Leeds. I was told people would be different [when I moved here] and I said people are people wherever they are, but never has truer word been spoken".

The importance of the local labour market depends on the companies' involvement with it. For the media company there is a clear divide between local and national employees. For the banking company, the local labour market supplies most of their employees, but as is clear from the above quote, the managers are often recruited from outside the area. So the local labour market has different functions for different companies, depending on their needs and their national system of employment recruitment.

There are other organisations involved in the question, what is the power of the locale? To use Peck (1996) again, "labour markets are instituted and regulated in locally-specific ways" (p.12), that is, the other organisations and structures of the state in the local area will play a significant role in the local uniqueness of the labour market. The local authority in Manchester has been very active in both labour market and disability areas for over 15 years. Internally it has a sophisticated personnel policy with regards to employment rights, information, industrial relations and disabled employment. An example of this is the present policy of redeployment within the authority of disabled employees, whose current jobs are at risk and the setting of an internal quota of disabled employees (of 9.2 per cent, much higher than the official quota of 3 per cent).⁵⁴ In fact it is claimed that Manchester City Council is the local authority with the largest proportion of disabled employees. The internal policy is reflected in what the authority does outside its own organisation. Manchester City Council has pushed the provision of services for disabled people in the area and in the area of transport has achieved a great deal; Manchester was the first city to have all their taxis accessible for disabled people and the city's 'Metrolink' tram system is fully accessible. The authority sees itself as 'an example' to the area, to other organisations and to companies. It feels that it can have an influence on local policy-making and action around equal opportunities and disability.

The local voluntary 'umbrella' organisation of disabled people, which supplies information and advice to Manchester's disabled people, considers that it has an influence in Manchester, both within the local authority and more broadly. This influence is recognised, it claims, across the country, where the Manchester group is seen to be "very strong". However, for all its influence and work it failed to prevent the largest local bus

⁵⁴ The Quota system was abolished with the introduction of the DDA in 1995 (see Chapter One).

company from commissioning a whole new fleet of buses, “not one of which is accessible”, and the designs for the new centre of Manchester (destroyed by the recent bomb) do not as yet include any disabled parking spaces. The group see it as a constant uphill struggle, which they sum up as, “you’re doing great, then something happens”. The organisation is funded by the local authorities of Greater Manchester and one of its directors is a key figure in the city council. This has certainly had an impact on the council’s policy making. This introduces another point: in the discussions in Manchester it becomes clear that a few individuals are crucial in the local institutional network, a person in the city council, a director of the voluntary group and a person in the Employment Service. Together these individuals and the institutions create a particular local ‘situation’.

The companies in the research claimed, however, to have little to do with the local institutions. The banking company did say that it was on a number of local committees, but that they were “not useful in employment terms. We just do it because we’re expected”. One of the committees attended by the banking company includes other large employers in the area - in fact all three of the companies in the research meet on this committee. The communications company has links with the Equal Opportunities Commission, which is located in Manchester, and occasionally sees the Training and Enterprise Council, but it has very little to do with the local authority. The media company has some links with the Training and Enterprise Council but, as with its recruitment, looks mostly outside the local area for connections. The local institutions *do* matter to the companies, as Peck (1996) argues, but perhaps in a more indirect way than he envisages. The policies and practices of the local authority, voluntary organisations and employment service have some links into the companies, but it is more that the local institutions generate the context for the companies to operate in, an atmosphere that the companies gradually ‘breathe in’. A good example is the local authority legislation on the accessibility of taxis: even the media company will be influenced by this - as its executives arrive from London and hail a cab, they will probably notice the yellow ‘disabled’ symbol. Also, in the same way as the companies recruit in different labour markets, they will be influenced by different areas of local institutional policy. So, the

banking company, with its higher local recruitment and membership of several committees, will be influenced to a greater extent than the media company, with little local recruitment and little contact. It is the *depth* of the involvement in the locality that determines the power of the locale.

8.4.3 The understanding of disability and employment in the national and the locale

The above discussion argued that it is the web of connections between national and locales that 'make up' the company and that the locale plays a distinct role in the process. The flow of connections is highly uneven and variable and is shot through with differential relations of power. The policy on disability and employment of the companies is involved in these flows of connections. The simultaneous decentralisation and centralisation within the companies means that there is, for the local managers and eventually for the whole company, a complex 'working out' process over disability and employment. Managers have to 'blend' the competing demands of their local organisation and requirements of their employees and the national policy making of the company. In doing this the understanding of disability and employment becomes inherently spatial - the very understanding of what the disability and employment relationship is and should be, is being seen through and over the national and local structure of the company. Space does make a difference here, not in the traditional sense of a locality being different, but in the more complex way of ideas and practices working *across* space.

The locale, it was argued, has power in relation to the companies' 'depth' of involvement. The local authority, voluntary groups, Employment Service and Training and Enterprise Council, understand the disability-employment relation in a whole range of ways. The 'character' of their understanding is different from the companies', so the way that the companies understand the relation will be influenced, to varying degrees, by the local interpretation of disability and employment. The way that local organisations understand disability is important too: both the local authority and the voluntary organisation see disability as defined by the person involved, a much more open

definition than that used by the Government, but quite in tune with the three companies, who, in their monitoring programme, leave the definition of disability to the respondent.

What is vital to the understanding of the disability-employment relation is a recognition that the spatial structures of, and flows within, the companies are central to the development of the relation. The process and materialisation of the understanding and representation of the relation and the position and experience of disabled people in employment, takes place across space, between different people and places within the companies. It is the concept of 'process', so central to the embodied approach, that is perhaps most useful, because by using 'process' we necessarily imply movement and change and this both 'creates' and 'recreates' understandings and practices. And this movement and change not only moves across space, but also creates it. So, the materialisation of the disability-employment relation in the companies takes place in the space of the national and local connection. The body of the employee is the medium through which this materialisation takes place and the entity which makes the spatial connection between the national and locale. The employee's body is what 'pins down' the relation, and makes it real. Adding a spatial element to our embodied approach to disability and employment can provide a better understanding of disabled people's positions and experiences in employment.

8.5 Conclusion

The chapter covered three themes. Firstly, all three companies have gone through enormous structural and employment changes over the last five years, changes that have transformed the employer-employee relation, in a new era of 'corporate culture'. It was argued that the major changes in employment practice - flexibility, together with downsizing and satellite operations - have had a significant impact on the disabled employees in the companies. The impact has been overwhelmingly negative, with pressure coming from all sides on the performance of disabled people in work.

Secondly, an embodied approach was used to think through the changes in the arrangements of employment, which have happened as the companies have restructured, primarily through techniques of 'flexible' working. The analysis argued that there have

been, in the context of the restructuring, significant challenges to the understanding and practice of employment and disability and the disability-employment relation. However, these challenges have not completely disrupted the importance of the relation between disability and employment. There is a 'looseness' to the definitions and understandings of disability and employment, but it is a looseness 'tied down' by relations of power around these meanings, relations of power which are materialised through the bodies of the employees. The changing meanings of 'disability' and 'employment' are fixed in the bodies of the employees, but fixed impermanently as the meanings are continually 'remade'.

Thirdly, the organisation of the companies both in the workplace and nationally-locally has involved space and spatial processes in the production and reproduction of the understanding of disability and employment. The chapter argued that recognising the way that space is involved in the disability-employment relation both allows a more effective analysis of the way that companies represent and understand the relation and forces one to think about the complexity of the materialisation of the processes of the relation. The chapter, using the argument from Chapter Four, concluded that a combined spatial and embodied approach to the analysis of the disability-employment relation could possibly provide a critical and enlightening understanding of this complex issue.

Conclusion

The motivating question of the research was what impact the increased prevalence of flexible employment practices has had on the opportunities for, and experiences of, disabled people in employment. This conclusion will pull together the theoretical and empirical analysis presented here to provide a 'response' to this question. This will connect into a discussion of the 'embodied approach' to disability and employment, which this research has developed. Finally, the conclusion will consider the issue of the disability identity, a recurring theme in the research.

So, what response can be given to the motivating question of the research? Throughout the research the terms 'disability' and 'disabled people', and 'employment' and 'flexible employment', have been critiqued and deconstructed. It is important to recognise that the understandings of these terms vary amongst the organisations, employers and employees interviewed in the research and that these understandings undergo continual change. However, differences in understanding do not allow one to shy away from the question. A response of some form must be given. There are critical 'moments' when disabled people and flexible employment are defined and these moments produce material experiences for those involved. It is the connection between representation and materiality that lies at the heart of what the research has attempted to do and, further, why the embodied approach is so useful.

The increased use of flexible employment practices has certainly had important consequences for all employees. But there is no doubt that disabled people have experienced these changes in a more extreme way. The Introduction discussed how flexible working could possibly impact on disabled people in two distinct ways, firstly, 'positively', in that many disabled people, unable to work a full-time or permanently because of physical or mental restrictions would be able to work for shorter periods or in their own time; secondly, 'negatively', as for some disabled people, a lack of certainty of when and for how long they are working could be a disincentive to employment. The research has discovered that the reality for disabled employees is a little more complex,

extremely varied and involves factors such as space and power that the initial debate does not include.

Firstly, is there evidence that disabled people are disproportionately employed in flexible employment? Data on disabled people in general, and related to employment in particular, is almost impossible to access. As Chapter One explained, differences in definitions and poor data collection, together with the reluctance of many people to identify as disabled, has meant that the only consistent source of data on disabled people is that based on 'Registered disabled people', a minority of disabled people in the UK. The Labour Force Survey (Winter 1995/6) showed that a higher proportion of disabled people were in part-time work (the most significant form of flexible employment) than all employees. However, the research stressed that it was more important how the job was organised, what the pay and conditions were like and how secure it was, i.e. the *process* of the job rather than the outcome.

In Chapter Seven, several of the organisations stressed the range of flexible employment practices and how it is not really employment that is the issue, but rather the quality and security of the employment, what the TUC called 'positive flexibility'. This raises the issue of labour market position and strength, that is, the issue of *power*. In this way, the impact of flexible employment will involve the same issue for all employees, as many people will be in a variety of positions of labour market strength, but many disabled people begin from a weaker labour market position and so will be particularly affected by the practices. And for some disabled people more *support* is required to enable the employment to be a success, in terms of equipment, access, extra time and staffing support.

It is when the needs of flexible employment and the needs of disabled employees match up that a positive opportunity is created. This opportunity may be real, as in an actual job, or representational, as in generating a more positive understanding of disabled people in flexible employment. Has there been a coming together of needs of employers and needs of disabled employees? Yes, but only for particular people in relation to particular jobs. There is huge variation within disabled people - expectations, abilities and availability - and it is clear that the 'coming together' (or not) of disabled people and

flexible employment involves much more than a rational, economic decision (on both sides), i.e. also, discrimination, access, attitudes and recruitment. And, many flexible jobs - part-time, temporary contract - are 'poor' jobs, reinforcing the poor position of disabled people in employment. Therefore, flexible working can offer opportunities for some disabled people (i.e. the needs of employer and employee connect), but for many others their poor experience is reinforced.

Chapter Eight highlighted the importance of space in the process of employment for disabled (and all) employees. The organisation of the workplace in the companies in Manchester, including the division of different work tasks in different spaces and the expectation of employees to involve space in their job self-management, had significant impacts on disabled employees. Certain people were sidelined in the workplace, others were shifted from 'public' to 'private' areas of the workplace and overall the use of space by the companies tended to reinforce the dominant understanding of disability and so restrict opportunities. The importance of the body in space, in the undertaking of work tasks, the movement of bodies or in the location of certain types of bodies, means that an embodied approach to flexible working is important.

Rethinking flexibility as an embodied process allows us to think of the situation for disabled employees in a different way. Rather than thinking simply of the relation between disabled people and employment as one of opportunity and restriction, we can reconceive the relationship as complex and embodied (people involved in their work). A rethinking of flexible employment casts this reworking of employment in a different perspective, one which recognises the embeddedness and, indeed, embodiedness of employment.

The embodied approach, the research has argued, allows one to get a better understanding of the relation between disability and flexible employment in workspaces because it encourages one to consider issues of process and materiality. That is, because the recent social theory of the body understands the body as a social entity, changed by and changing social processes through its actions, then it sees social events as continually in process, always being renegotiated in meaning and practice. Both disability and flexible employment are in continual process, as their meanings change and they change

society. Importantly, the body theory also stresses that these changing processes and meanings have material effects in the body of the person. So, although the processes are undergoing continual change, there are marks or imprints left on the body of the person. These material effects of social processes then impact back on society in an ongoing interaction. The meanings of disability and employment may change, but there are significant moments of certainty when the positions of disabled people in employment are clear and the impacts are real.

Such an embodied approach recognises that the relations between disabled people and flexible employment, so long understood as purely oppositional, are much more complex, as the experiences and expectations of disabled employees and the understandings and actions of managers are bound up with a whole series of processes and fixity centred in the bodies of the employees, which takes place within the context of the overriding and powerful discursive formation.

Throughout the research the issue of the meaning of disability has arisen. The above discussion has argued that there is a 'double-layered' process, with a continual debate over the meaning of disability amongst the individuals, organisations and employers included in the research taking place within the context of a dominant understanding that disability is an issue of individual tragedy. This final part of the conclusion will attempt to develop, albeit briefly, a possible new way of thinking about disability and, as a consequence, ability. A central part of the social oppression model's challenge to the dominant understanding of disability was that social processes created 'disability' and so could uncreate it. There was also a necessary strengthening of the boundary between disability and ability, a long-held binary relation, as difference was emphasised as part of a political and cultural campaign by disability organisations. So one form of certainty about disability - as determined by a medical condition - was replaced by another certainty, that of society as the cause. Shakespeare (1996) argues that a form of essentialism exists in the social model of disability, that disability is understood as an unambiguous identity, clearly separated from ability. He argues that such an essentialism is necessary for political and social movements as they attempt to challenge the dominant understanding of disability. He says, "why should we deconstruct our own

identities when our oppressors' identities are still so strong" (p.107). I want to argue that there is a need to think about the meaning of disability afresh, although 'deconstruct' is not the appropriate term. There is another way of thinking about disability that allows both a form of essentialism and diversity. We need to go back to the body. In the same way that the disability debate is often polarised between 'individual' and 'social' understandings, so the discussion around identity often falls into two camps, between 'psychological' and 'social'. Hall (1996) proposes a middle way or 'meeting' between these two approaches, in a process of "becoming rather than being, not so much who we are as who we might become" (p.4). So, in Hall's reckoning, disability is an 'identification' rather than an identity, as this implies the possibility of change, as a person can identify with the position or not and this is never ending. Hall further suggests that the body is the site of this continual negotiation over the identity of disability (and ability). So, the identification is not an open choice, but one that is embedded in the body and builds up over time. Such an embodied notion of identity can perhaps offer the possibility of a politically resolute campaign that has a clear understanding of a disability as a position of oppression and at the same time individual disabled people, in their complex lives including flexible employment, can work out their own notion of who they are and who they want to be. This understanding also allows people not usually classified as disabled to take part in the discussion. 'Ability', in the same way as 'whiteness' in the race debate, is undertheorised. But perhaps the divide is not so clear cut. For example, people who wear spectacles have gradually 'become' able-bodied, from a position of otherness, as the experience has become more widespread and lifestyles have changed so wearing glasses is no longer understood as such a problem. So, although people classified as 'disabled' have a particular experience in life and employment, we can perhaps find a way of thinking about our bodies that can involve everyone. Shakespeare (1996a) suggests a process of storytelling, in which the histories of our bodies and our experiences are told and connected to social understandings and actions. If we listen and engage with people's 'stories' of embodiment, of process and materialisation, then we will get a better understanding of the impact of flexible employment on disabled people and on us all.

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